A PIGEON WITH TWO NESTS: A CASE OF FIRST- AND SECOND-GENERATION IRANIANS

by

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ABSTRACT

Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iranians migrated to the United States in substantial numbers. Ever since this large-scale migration to the United States, first-generation Iranian immigrants have struggled to adapt to every-day life in America while retaining their culture and identities. How this process has played out varies depending on the diversity and Iranian population of where they reside. Iranian immigrants who moved to Los Angeles, the second largest urban center in the United States, have retained their culture mostly through language preservation. The second-generation Iranians' cultural retention varies but they retain culture, nonetheless, in order to strengthen family ties. The first-generation Iranian immigrants that reside in a medium-sized city, such as Salt Lake City, have looked to a wider range of cultural practices that retain their culture and identity. The second-generation Iranians that reside in Salt Lake City take cultural retention into their own hands by pursuing cultural practices and education for themselves. Both groups of Iranian immigrants have experienced identity conflict, which has resulted in a feeling of "homelessness" and non-belonging. Both cities of Iranians will be compared, as this thesis will explore the differences and similarities between the two. Weaved throughout this narrative of adaptation and cultural retention is the important role historical memory and pride – by way of Iranian nationalism – play.

“Most immigrants agree that at some point, we become permanent foreigners, belonging neither here nor there. Many tomes have been written trying to describe this feeling of floating between worlds but never fully landing. Artists, using every known medium from words to film to Popsicle sticks, have attempted to encapsulate the struggle of trying to hang on to the solid ground of our mother culture and realizing that we are merely in a pond balancing on a lily pad with a big kid about to belly-flop right in. If and when we fall into this pond, will we be singularly American or will we hyphenate? Can we hold on to anything or does our past just end up at the bottom of the pond, waiting to be discovered by future generations?” – Firoozeh Dumas, *Laughing Without an Accent: Adventures of an Iranian-American, at Home and Abroad*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Taher S., a second-generation Iranian-American living in Salt Lake City, discussed how his maternal grandmother came from Hungary. He mentioned that she gave up every aspect of her Hungarian identity and culture and established a new identity as an "American."[1] Taher lamented that her cultural history is now completely lost to him and his family.[2] As a result, Taher retains his Iranian culture so it will be passed on to his future children: "Identity is our own, we should own that identity."[3]

Sarah K., a second-generation Iranian-Mexican-American currently living in a city near the south bay region of Los Angeles, has a mother and extended family from Mexico. Her family no longer recognizes or celebrates any aspect of their Mexican culture. Her mother and grandmother did not teach her about nor raise her to appreciate the Mexican culture. In fact, she added, they do not mind discontinuing Mexican cultural practices and traditions altogether.[4] Despite this, Sarah retains her Iranian cultural heritage: she celebrates Nowruz (the Iranian New Year) every year with her father and Iranian family. She added that while her Mexican family does not appreciate their

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[1] Taher S., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 5, 2016.
[2] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[3] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[4] Sarah K., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Over-the-Phone Interview for Thesis Research. Salt Lake City, Utah, July 18, 2016.

culture, her Iranian family does so much that, "Seeing how passionate they [Sarah's Iranian family] are makes me appreciate being around them so much. Culture is really important."[5]

MarMar T., a second-generation American-Iranian-Afghani living in Torrance, California, has an Afghani mother and an Iranian father. Although MarMar stated that she is surrounded by and knows more of her Afghani family members than her Iranian relatives, the only aspect that persisted from her mother's side was their Islamic religious practice. MarMar noted that her mother simply does not care as much about her home country, nor does she want to return. Therefore, continuing Afghani traditions and culture is not a priority for her.[6] However, MarMar takes the initiative in maintaining her Iranian heritage, as she believes that celebrating one's own culture is important: "Everything has its own story and reason and it's really beautiful."[7]

The above stories are not unique, nor is the loss of heritage limited to the Hungarian, Mexican, and Afghani immigrants. Assimilation by immigrant groups in American society is generally fuller – particularly among Asian, European, and Hispanic immigrants. The sociologist Douglas S. Massey contends that the greater level of assimilation evident among Latino/a and Asian emigrants is due to:

> Low rates of retention of their original languages, significant socioeconomic progress among immigrants who spend significant time in the United States, clear evidence of intergenerational mobility, and relatively high rates of intermarriage between European whites and both Hispanics and Asians in the second and third generations.[8]

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[5] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.
[6] MarMar T., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Over-the-Phone Interview for Thesis Research. Salt Lake City, Utah, July 18, 2016.
[7] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.
[8] George S. Massey, "Assimilation in a New Geography," *New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration*, ed. George S. Massey (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 346. Massey deduced that this has been the pattern of adaptation among Asian, European, and Hispanic immigrants up until now, but he also recognizes that this fluidity may not always be so easy in the future as

While many immigrant groups have relinquished much of their heritage, Taher, Sarah, and MarMar all illustrate the opposite – a general pattern among Iranian immigrants to preserve their cultural heritage and identity.

So why does the discussion of Iranian immigration matter? Furthermore, why does immigration history matter at all? The answer is simple: everyone in the United States of America, aside from American Indian peoples, migrated to the United States from elsewhere. The United States is a country of hundreds of different cultures, traditions, and languages. This topic is especially important today when the rhetoric on culture and race has become so heated. At this time, more than ever, it is important to look at why different ethnicities and their cultural contributions are important to society. Iranian immigration matters to the discussion of immigration history in particular because the United States has the largest Iranian population outside of Iran itself. These Iranian immigrants contribute to the cultural diversity of American society. One can find ongoing Iranian cultural events, restaurants, or concerts in most large cities. But they also differ from other immigrant groups because they are "elite" immigrants, both educationally and professionally. Many Iranians, especially those who earned degrees prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, are engineers, doctors, lawyers, or professionals in related fields. Unlike so many other immigrants who were pulled to the United States in search of economic opportunity, they were pushed from their native land by political upheaval. According to the 2000 Census, nearly 29.4 percent of foreign-born Iranians, 25 years and older, hold a college degree, while 25.5 percent hold graduate degrees.[9] By contrast, of all foreign-born people in the United States – and not limited to one sole immigrant

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things like educational attainment, the growth of undocumented immigrants, and the "demonization by demagogues in politics, the media, and even academia" continue to grow in the United States, 346.

[9] United States, *Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, D.C.: The Bureau of the Census, 2000).

group like the Iranian immigrant group – only 26 percent have a bachelor's or graduate degree.[10]

Another important distinction, one that will be the prime focus of this thesis, is that these Iranian immigrants have distinctly remained Iranian while managing to adapt to every-day life, including work, social life, and learning the English language. At the same time, Iranian immigrants have managed retention of Iranian culture through the preservation of the Persian language and by providing cultural continuity in participating in Iranian organizations and events like film festivals, and concerts. However, retention of culture and their persistent Iranian identity is no unique phenomenon to these immigrants alone. What is unique is the strong underlying narrative of pride, which has weaved its way through how both first- and second-generation Iranians interact with their cultural retention, and identities.

Throughout this thesis, different terms will be used and thus need to be defined. The terms "adaptation" and "assimilation" are hereafter used interchangeably to refer to the first-generation Iranian immigrant's process of integration into a new society and culture. The term "identity" is used to describe an association with an ethnic group. Identity is something that is "grounded in culture, as a communicative system comprising shared meanings, artifacts, symbols, practices, and beliefs, their making, understanding and reproduction." The term "retention of (Iranian) culture," or "cultural retention," is hereafter used to discuss the first-generation Iranian immigrant's ability to maintain their culture in their new society. "Cultural retention" is also a subjective view of how the first- and second-generation Iranians understand their cultural heritage. However, if their

[10] Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "Iran," in *The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration since 1965,* eds. Mary C. Waters, Reed Ueda, and Helen B. Marrow (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007): 473.

culture is not an inherited cultural practice, then the term "cultural acquisition" is used in place of "cultural retention."

Underlying in the ability of cultural retention and identity is a persistent Iranian nationalism. Both Reza Shah Pahlavi and his son and successor Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (known to most Americans as simply "the Shah") consciously promoted Iranian nationalism, which resulted in a sense of ethnic Iranian pride alongside their programs to modernize the nation. Reza Shah pursued the modernization and industrialization of Iran through an extensive program of reform and development that "affected all spheres of urban life."[11] His son continued policies of reform and development under the auspices of the "White Revolution" which promoted a modern Iran. From the beginning of Reza Shah's reign in 1919 and continued through the Shah's reign as well, the Shahs' consciously reworked and appropriated a pre-Islamic Iranian cultural identity in his use of Iranian nationalism. This henceforth led the Iranian people to define themselves through a "purely Iranian" cultural heritage. In other words, this Iranian nationalism aimed to solidify an identity that was "purely Iranian" and thus instituted great cultural pride among the Iranian people, which continues today. The Shahs hoped that by reigniting a national Iranian pride, they would also convince the people of Iran to want a more "cosmopolitan" and "Westernized" country. Iranian nationalism thus formed a major part of the Shah's plan for "freedom and independence" from British, Russian, and American imperialistic interests in Iran's oil.[12] This thesis is not meant to be an exhaustive political history. Instead, its intentions are to understand how pride, as a result

[11] Mehrdad Amanat, "Nationalism and Social Change in Contemporary Iran," in *Irangeles: Iranians in Los Angeles,* eds. Ron Kelley, Jonathan Friedlander and Anita Colby (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9.
[12] Shabnam J. Holliday, *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance* (Farnham, Surrey, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 50.

of Iranian nationalism, has shaped the ways in which both big and medium city first- and second-generation Iranians retain their culture and how they identify.

The Shah emphasized education as one pathway to Westernization. It was also an economic move. As the country moved towards industrialization with booming oil production, the Shah wanted his people to become educated in order to work in Iran's oil industry. However, Iran did not have the educational infrastructure to accommodate so many students and many were sent out of the country for their education. By leaving Iran, often traveling to the United States or Europe for education, the Iranian people became more international and thus experienced "Westernized" influences. Many Iranians looked to America as the model for their country's Westernization. Therefore, the Shah instituted English as the main second language taught in Iranian schools. Additional social transformation reforms were also instituted to replace longstanding "aristocratic privilege" with "new measures of social status, such as educational level and influence in state agencies."[13] This social transformation consisted of adopting Western style and tastes as a symbol of social status.[14] Other educational reforms illustrated the Shah's effort to instill a modern Iranian identity. For example, he encouraged Persian speakers to rid the language of "Arabic words." But the use of French words persisted as France was seen as a "modernized" country. Even more dramatically, the Shah banned the veiling of women and enforced Westernized dress. The historian Mehrdad Amanat explained that:

> The Shah, influenced by ideas of Persian nationalism, deliberately identified Iran with pre-Islamic symbols and glorified the achievements of the ancient Persian Empire. The invading Arab armies of the 7th century were now blamed for imposing their religion on the 'pure Persian race,'

[13] Amanat, "Nationalism and Social Change in Contemporary Iran," 20.
[14] Ron Kelley, "Wealth and Illusions of Wealth in the Los Angeles Iranian Community," in *Irangeles: Iranians in Los Angeles*, eds. Ron Kelley, Jonathan Friedlander, and Anita Colby (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), 260.

> destroying its superior culture, and causing several centuries of political and economic decline.[15]

Regardless of their political positions on both Reza Shah and the Shah's programs, most first-generation Iranian immigrants have subconsciously adopted, in one form or another, the proud mindset from Iranian nationalism. Iranian nationalism's success has even spanned generations: not only have first-generation Iranians felt pride in their culture, this sense of nationalistic pride continues to this day through the second-generation Iranians. But when did Iranian migration to the United States truly begin?

Iranian migration to the United State is a fairly recent phenomenon. Virtually no documented immigration took place before 1920 and in the following decade, only 208 Iranians attained permanent resident status in the United States.[16] The year 1929 marked the beginning of a slow but steady increase of Iranian immigrants attaining resident status up to the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1969, the number of immigrants nearly tripled to 9,059.[17] This was the "first wave" of Iranian migration and was a result of the Shah's educational initiative that led many Iranians to seek education abroad. Although most intended to return to work in Iran's oil industry, some married American citizens while others sought permanent resident status for a range of other personal, occupational, or familial reasons.[18]

An even larger number of Iranian immigrants came to the United States during the 1970s. This was the "second wave." During this period, nearly 33,763 Iranians attained

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[15] Amanat, "Nationalism and Social Change in Contemporary Iran," 12.
[16] United States, *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2014), 8.
[17] United States, *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 8.
[18] Behnaz Jalali, "Iranian Families," in *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, eds. Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano, and Nydia Garcia-Preto (New York: Guilford, 1982): 290.

permanent resident status in the United States.[19] Unlike the first wave, this group consisted mainly of refugees who migrated with family and friends.[20] Then, between 1978 and 1980 came the "third wave," which saw the highest boom of 98,141 Iranian immigrants attaining resident status.[21] During this time, most emigrated for personal and economic security. Third-wave Iranian immigrants were the only group that truly felt compelled to leave due to the political, social, and religious differences with the new Islamic Republic of Iran.[22]

Both the second and third waves were due, mainly, to the worsening political climate that culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which saw the overthrow of the Shah and the introduction of an Islamic Republic led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The Revolution instantly halted educational migration to the United States. The subsequent Iranian Hostage Crisis severed diplomatic ties between the two nations. As poor relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States have continued to this day, Iranian immigrants have had to pursue a United States visa outside Iran.

The years following the Revolution witnessed continued emigration as thousands of Iranian students, workers, and citizens migrated to the United States. Some were granted political and religious asylum, while other Iranians were forced to seek American visas outside of the country. Many who came during the 1980s did so to avoid conscription for the Iran-Iraq War. At the same time, many others fled Iran for personal and economic security. Immigrant numbers steadily dropped after 2000 and have leveled out since 2009

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[19] United States, *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 8.
[20] Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "From Iranian Studies to Studies of Iranians in the United States," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 1 (1998), 7. "Second" and "third wave" terminology outlined on page 6.
[21] United States, *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 8.
[22] Jalali, "Iranian Families," 290.

with between 8,000-9,000 people entering the United States per year.[23]

California became the most popular destination for Iranian immigrants. In 1972, about 27.2 percent of Iranian immigrants settled in California and by 1980, Los Angeles contained nearly 21,380 (21.1 percent) of all Iranian immigrants.[24] In 1986 nearly 49.3 percent of immigrants settled in California.[25] As of 2000, over 31.1 percent of Iranian immigrants resided in Los Angeles.[26] It is clear that Iranians prefer more cosmopolitan areas that are multiethnic and multinational, with a mild climate, a liberal society, with several excellent educational institutions to choose from, like in California.[27]

For this thesis, a comparative contrast between first- and second-generation Iranians who live in a medium city, like Salt Lake City,[28] and first- and second-generation Iranians who live in a big city, like Los Angeles, will be explored. This thesis will assess the differences and similarities in cultural retention and identity among these Iranians and how their abilities range and vary depending on the cities they live in. But it is firstly important to understand the differences between these two cities. Exploration of Iranians in Salt Lake City offers a unique perspective and influences these Iranians' cultural retention and identity, as Salt Lake City's culture is less diverse. As the economist Pamela Perlich, noted: "Census data for the past 150 years confirm the widely

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[23] United States, *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 10. The *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* did not start their documentation of Iranian asylees until 2005, but from source materials, it is evident that between 2005-2014, about 100-600 Iranians were granted asylum in the United States.
[24] United States, *Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, D.C.: The Bureau of the Census, 1980).
[25] Mehdi Bozorgmehr and Daniel Douglas, "Success(ion): Second Generation Iranian Americans," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2011), 14-15.
[26] Bozorgmehr, "Iran," 473.
[27] Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh, "Iran-Iraqi War and the Migration of Iranian Youth to California," in *Encyclopedia of Immigration and Migration in the American West,* eds. Gordon Morris Bakken and Alexanda Kindell (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2006), 338.
[28] *Census of Population and Housing* as well as *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* volumes tend to lump Iranians into the ethnic category of "Asian." Thus, migration by specific ethnicities to smaller towns, such as Salt Lake City, is hard to find.

held view that Utah is less racially and ethnically diverse than the nation."[29] She continued, "From the mid-19th century settlement of Utah by the Mormon pioneers to the present day, the White race has been the dominant majority."[30] In other words, Utah's culture is defined as the White, Mormon capital of the world. The substantial presence of this culture and religion has created an often-insular culture, but at the same time, it is very welcoming of Middle Eastern immigrants. Of course there is still a small foreign-born population that exists which has increased Utah's diversity. This foreign-born population consists of people from Latin America and Asia.[31] The population also contains people from other racial groups including American Indian and Native Alaskan, African American, and Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders. But overwhelmingly, Utah's population is mainly White.[32] In contrast, Los Angeles has a long and complex population history. But World War II, and the subsequent internment of Japanese-Americans who had largely inhabited Los Angeles, drastically transformed the city's population. It altered it into one of African American, Anglo (White), and European neighborhoods. The city also witnessed immigrants from China, Latin America, and the Middle East as well.[33] Aside from being majorly White – nearly 71.1 percent of the population is "White alone" – Los Angeles also has distinct African American, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander populations.[34] As mentioned, today Los Angeles has one of the most sizable Iranian populations outside of

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[29] Pamela S. Perlich, *Utah Minorities: The Story Told by 150 Years of Census Data* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bureau of Economic and Business Research, David S. Eccles School of Business, University of Utah, 2002), accessed October 21, 2016, http://gardner.utah.edu/bebr/Documents/studies/Utah_Minorities.pdf, 1.
[30] Perlich, *Utah Minorities*, 1.
[31] Perlich, *Utah Minorities*, 1.
[32] Perlich, *Utah Minorities*, 3.
[33] Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005), 201.
[34] "Quick Facts: Los Angeles County, California," United States Census Bureau, last modified in July 2015, accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/LFE305214/06037.

Iran itself. The diversity of Los Angeles' population compared to the mainly White and Mormon population of Salt Lake City sheds light on the differences between the first- and second-generation Iranian populations within both cities.

With the different population histories of Los Angeles and Salt Lake City in mind, Chapter 2 explores how Iranians living in both cities have adapted to every-day life in the United States, while simultaneously retaining Iranian culture. This negotiation of culture should be understood in the context of a complicated array of pressures that include higher education, the quest for United States citizenship, differing socio-economic status, and individualism. Included in the discussion regarding Iranian cultural identity is the notion that these Iranian immigrants have a "second nature" belief in their complete "Americanization" – meaning that they have adapted so well to the daily life matters of society but at the same time they have defining aspects of "Iranianness" that they are unaware of and never relinquish. Such lingering aspects include their accents, eating solely Iranian cuisine, and almost exclusively speaking Persian at home. This chapter ends in a discussion of cultural retention – or in the case of some of the medium city second-generation Iranians, cultural acquisition – between medium and big city second-generation Iranians. Often, the second-generation Iranians socially engineer their cultural practices or find a renewed interest in cultural retention during their college years. This discussion also outlines the importance that the second-generation places on passing down the Iranian culture and history to their children and spouses as means of cultural retention. But pride is truly at the heart of how both the first- and second-generation Iranians have adapted to every-day life matters and, at the same time, managed their cultural retention.

Chapter 3 addresses the nature of self-identification for both medium and big city first-generation Iranian immigrants and second-generation Iranians. This chapter discusses the lack of a unified Iranian identity and the reasons for it. Once the first-generation Iranian immigrants settled in their new country, they found that they had to grapple with the question of their identity. Several events caused an identity crisis for Iranians abroad such as the Hostage Crisis or the terrorist attacks of 9/11, continuing terrorist attacks, and the racism and xenophobia that were a result of these events. That native-born Americans are largely ignorant of the geography of the Middle East and its vast cultural differences also contributes to this identity crisis. These events spurred the "impetus for the birth and popularity of a set of new ethnic labels including Persian, Persian-American, and Iranian-American among Iranians in the United States."[35] Mohsen Mobasher argued that the Revolution and the Hostage Crisis created a trauma in Iranian identity, which identity has suffered. This Iranian identity crisis has thus created "hyphenated identities" (i.e., identification as "Iranian-American" or "Persian-American") or identities that borrow heavily from the homeland and their upper-class status of the Pahlavi era.[36] This identity crisis led many to feel a sense of "homelessness," of not belonging in their societies and families as well. For the second-generation Iranians, as some socially engineer their culture, many of them also "invent" themselves as Iranian.

The underlying factor centered around the discussions on adaptation to every-day

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[35] Mohsen Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 1 (2006): 107.
[36] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 101; Maboud Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America* (New York, New York: Pardis Press, Inc., 1992), 155; Nilou Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," *The Sociological Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 682.

life, retention of culture, and identity is pride in culture, as a result of Iranian nationalism. How this aspect factors into these topics for both first- and second-generation Iranians allows them to create a culture and identity that is both Iranian *and* American. Pride will inextricably be weaved throughout the narrative of this thesis, as it is the guiding force behind adaptation to every-day life, retention of culture, and identity. By the end of this thesis, the reader will understand the true significance of Iranian's cultural contribution to American society as well as the struggles in identity that persist for many of these people today.

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, scholars of Iranian immigration to the United States have argued that the high educational level and English proficiency of first-generation Iranian immigrants are the main and only links to their unique professional success and social adaptability in their new country.[37] Mehdi Bozorgmehr has comprehensively covered the scholarly works on how the successful adaptation of Iranian immigrants to every-day American life is related to their high socioeconomic standing.[38] Concerning Iranian-immigrant adaptation to every-day life matters as well as the unique Iranian capacity for cultural retention, specifically in the first generation, past sources have failed to consider the other factors that affect adaptation, such as citizenship attainment, education, class status, individualism, and pride. Thus, the high socioeconomic standing of Iranian immigrants is not the only factor in their adaptation. Scholars have yet to compare and contrast the adaptation in every-day matters and cultural retention of big and medium (or even small) cities. This ignores a sizeable

[37] Bozorgmehr, "Iran," 473; Amanat, "Nationalism and Social Change in Contemporary Iran," 28.
[38] Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "Iranians," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: A Reference Handbook,* ed. David W. Haines (Westport, Connecticut and London, England: Greenwood Press, 1996), 227.
[38] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America*, 229.

portion of Iranian immigrants living in medium and smaller-sized cities and how they, too, fit in to the encompassing discussion of Iranian immigration.

Information about Iranian immigration to small and medium-sized cities is more limited, as scholars have focused only on the patterns of adaptation demonstrated by Iranians living in large cities.[39] Without understanding how different populations of first-generation Iranians behave in different-sized cities, it is hard to make broadly encompassing assertions of who first- and second-generation Iranians really are and why they have adapted as they have, managed cultural retention, and identify as they do. In as far as identity is concerned, sources have missed the role American identity plays in the formation of Iranian *and* American hyphenated identities – something that many first-generation Iranians are now coming to terms with. In other words, many Iranian immigrants no longer believe that they can identify only as "Iranian" as many of them have lived in the United States as long as they ever did in Iran. Especially since the reverberations of the Hostage Crisis are no longer felt, this occurrence no longer plays a real role in how first-generation Iranians retain culture or manage identity. Scholars have mostly ignored the role that pride, as a result of Iranian nationalism, and the betterment programs have played in the discussion of adaptation in every day life, cultural retention, and identity. Even more important and most ignored is a present-day look at the second-generation Iranian group's role in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution era first-generation migration. Today we are seeing the effects on the second-generation Iranians' cultural retention and identity crises incurred by the first-generation Iranian migration. As these second-generation Iranians are now coming of age, they deserve a deeper look.

In order to explore these larger issues and gaps in scholarly works, several medium

[39] Bozorgmehr, "From Iranian Studies to Studies of Iranians in the United States," 18.

and big first- and second-generation Iranian oral history interviews were conducted as the main primary source base for this thesis. The medium and big city first- and second-generation Iranians were chosen from a pool of acquaintances. Participants were not sought out based on political, religious, or ethnic affiliations. However, special care was taken to ensure an equal amount of female and male participants. The medium city interviews were conducted in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the big city interviews were conducted either over-the-phone, in Santa Monica, or in Laguna Beach, California.

The first-generation Iranians were asked questions in relation to four themes: migration and assimilation, adaptation in every day life, cultural retention, and identity. Migration and assimilation questions included such migration stories as why they decided to leave, who they came with, when they left, and what the conditions in Iran were like upon departure. Assimilation included questions such as English proficiency level upon arrival in the United States, differences noticed in culture between home and host country, and friendship groups in the United States. Questions regarding adaptation in daily life and discrimination included differences noticed in technology, housing, shopping, television, music, movies, food, and holidays between the host and home country; experiences with public transit and driving; perceptions of America before and after arrival; how they feel they have adapted; and if they experienced discrimination and why they believe the discrimination occurred. Questions related to cultural retention concerned participation in Iranian organizations, holiday practices (both American and Iranian), events, cooking, language, traditions, and encouragement of their children's cultural and language participation. Identity concerned questions such as what they believe "Americanness" is and what it means to them, what they see as their identity, if

they identify as “Persian” or “Iranian,” and if they are conflicted between their identities.

The second-generation Iranians were asked questions in relation to four themes: biographical data, cultural retention, discrimination, and identity. Questions in regard to biographical data concerned family history, religious participation, and Iranian family and friend relations. Cultural retention and discrimination questions included participation in Iranian organizations, events, holiday practices (American, Iranian, or other), and traditions; if the participant has traveled to Iran or if they want to; if they know the Persian language or if they want to learn; and if the participant experienced discrimination and why they believe the discrimination occurred. Questions on identity revolved around what they believe “Americanness” is and what it means to them; what they see their identity as; if they identify as “Iranian” or Persian”; and if they are conflicted between their identities.

CHAPTER 2

ADAPTATION AND CULTURAL RETENTION AMONG FIRST- AND SECOND- GENERATION IRANIANS

Big and Medium City First-Generation Iranian Immigrants

While many first-generation Iranians reported easy adaptation to every-day life matters in the United States, their cultural retention still persists. Even medium city immigrants, who one would think might find it easier to lose aspects of their Iranianness due to the smaller Iranian population in Salt Lake City, also retain their culture. Perhaps the first-generation Iranian immigrants' success in adaptation to every-day life matters has to do with past invasions that Persia endured such as the Arab invasion of the seventh century. Such incursions required the culture to get used to adjusting and adapting over the centuries. One of the medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees agreed with this sentiment. Cyrus M. stated that everything was different to him when he first arrived, but "we Iranians adapt ourselves, we accept other countries' cultures."[1] But how do they truly manage this adaptation? The contributing factors that play a role in Iranians immigrants' adaptation to every-day life must be looked at through a lens of cosmopolitan and modern life structures such as high educational and citizenship attainment, English language fluency, and individualism. Individualism, as opposed to

[1] Cyrus M., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 7, 2016.

communalism, is one aspect of Westernized life that many Iranian immigrants have assumed alongside their adaptation in the United States. The ways in which cultural retention is displayed between the medium and big city first-generation Iranian immigrants will be examined second. While the medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants tend to value cultural practices as extremely important to persist, the big city first-generation Iranian immigrants are more concerned with the continued use of their language. Cultural elements of Iranian life such as communalism, class status, and pride also play roles in the first-generation Iranian immigrants' cultural retention. Pride is one of the most important underlying factors for cultural retention, as instilled by the Shahs' Iranian nationalism.

While conducting oral history interviews with first-generation Iranian immigrants, one thing became obvious: there was an overwhelming consensus that no matter of every-day life was too difficult for them to adapt to. In other words, they believe their adaptation to American society has been seamless. One would imagine that this is true of many other immigrants or of any person in a new environment, given enough time. Things that seem strange at first become familiar over time. However, first-generation Iranian immigrant adaptation to daily life in America has been largely shaped by one major aspect universal to industrialized and cosmopolitan countries: education. The Iranians who migrated to the United States saw education as their first priority. As Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh stated in his article, "The Iranian teenagers and young adults' first priority was attaining the best education possible in the American academic system to grow distinctively in their new home."[2] Aiming for education and elevated professional status motivates them to "rank among the highest in the minority groups currently living

[2] Farzaneh, "Iran-Iraqi War and the Migration of Iranian Youth to California," 338.

in the United States."[3] Generally, those with greater education are more receptive to new environments and thus better able to adapt to their new situation. Education is particularly relevant to the first-generation Iranian immigrants' in this regard. All of the first-generation Iranians interviewees have at least a bachelor's degree and all are working professionals – aside from one first-generation Iranian immigrant, Avisha S., who is currently a student. Since they have all attained their citizenship – again, Avisha aside who plans to apply for citizenship this year – and are all educated and working professionals, this automatically puts them in a higher social and economic class. This thus allows for easier adaptation in daily life matters, as opposed to other immigrant groups who migrated for economic reasons and who have yet to attain neither advanced education nor citizenship.

Fluency in English is another critical factor in the immigrants' adaptation to life in America. One study found that nearly 75 percent of first-generation Iranians speak English "well or very well."[4] But despite these statistics, Persian language preservation remains important to many Iranian immigrants who tend to be fluent in both English and Persian. The same study concluded that bilingualism was more consistent among Iranian exiles.[5] While that is a plausible deduction, it is my conclusion that many Iranian immigrants, exile status or not, saw English as a "modern" and thus useful language due to Reza Shah and the Shah's programs. Often those who did not learn English in school had tutors outside of class. For instance, Avisha S., a medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant, grew up learning English in Iran and was fluent by the time she arrived in the

[3] Farzaneh, "Iran-Iraqi War and the Migration of Iranian Youth to California," 338.
[4] Bozorgmehr and Douglas, "Success(ion): Second Generation Iranian Americans," 14.
[5] Bozorgmehr and Douglas, "Success(ion): Second Generation Iranian Americans," 14.

United States.[6] The same is true of another medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant, Amir B., who took English classes in Iran after he graduated from high school.[7] Lily A., also a medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant, had studied English in Iran since she was a child.[8] She, too, was fluent by the time she arrived in the United States. Big city first-generation Iranian immigrants Hamed E. and Latifeh H., who are siblings, also grew up learning English in their schools in Iran.[9] Thus, by learning English, these Iranians have experienced ease in adapting to daily life matters in the United States – another crucial factor in adaptation success alongside education and citizenship. But at the same time, Iranian immigrants are able to preserve their Persian language, which allows them the opportunity to be both "modernized" Americans *and* cultural Iranians.

First-generation Iranians' adaptation in daily life matters is also affected by individualism as well as communalism. The family obligations of communal life are crucial and often survive the longest. In Iran, communalism, or a sense of community, was and still is a very important facet of life, dating back to Zoroastrian times when "duties of children toward their parents were considered sacred."[10] However, once a person makes the choice to migrate to a cosmopolitan country, like the United States, one leaves their family and regional context behind them. Their obligations to the family unit are reduced. As immigrants became more familiar with Western individualism, they

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[6] Avisha S., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interviews for Thesis Research. Salt Lake City, Utah, June 24. 2016.
[7] Amir B., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interviews for Thesis Research. Salt Lake City, Utah, June 8, 2016.
[8] Lily A., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interviews for Thesis Research. Salt Lake City, Utah, June 10, 2016.
[9] Hamed E., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interviews for Thesis Research. Santa Monica, California, July 22, 2016; Latifeh H., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interviews for Thesis Research. Santa Monica, California, July 22, 2016.
[10] Jalali, "Iranian Families," 294.

perceived fewer ethnic and family restraints in adapting to the society around them. Communalism still exists among the first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees as family ties remain important. But individualism also exists, as several members of the first-generation Iranians' family, friends, or community do not surround them. This fact allows these Iranian immigrants to adapt to daily life matters much more easily because their communal inheritances are much more softened, and fewer family obligations exist. But for other Iranian immigrants, their individualistic qualities often reflect the need many immigrants feel to become fully American not only in adaptation of every-day matters but also in personality, appearance, and name. Some take on more individualistic qualities of establishing their complete Americanization status. For instance, one big city immigrant, Shahram Z., adopted the name "Ray" at his retail job because it was more "American" and easy for his customers to remember and pronounce. [11] As in Shahram's case, for many Iranians immigrants, changing one's name to be "more American" allows them to construct a new identity and status as Americans which in turn helps to "facilitate their assimilation and economic success" in a new country.[12] In his article, Nilou Mostofi stated, "Through transformations, Iranian-Americans reconstruct their public persona or outer identity to facilitate the process of assimilation."[13] Mostofi continued:

> Iranian-Americans maintain a dual identity between their public and private selves in which the interpretation and use of space and the construction of the 'whitified' body help assimilate the public identity in mainstream culture while sustaining the Iranian diasporic identity in the private domain.[14]

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[11] Shahram Z., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. Laguna Beach, California, July 24, 25, and 29, 2016.
[12] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 694.
[13] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 694.
[14] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 697.

For some like Shahram, Iranian nationalism worked by instilling the importance of westernization and, indirectly, Western concepts like individualism.

With the largest population of Iranian immigrants anywhere in the United States, Los Angeles has earned the nickname of "Tehrangeles." It would seem that traditional communal values would remain the strongest here and pose a real barrier to adaptation. While there is the possibility that immigrants might become so immersed in the Iranian community that they could successfully stave off assimilation, this was not the case for the big city first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees. For example, Touraj R. moved initially to Massachusetts from Iran in 1975 and he later moved to Los Angeles for work. In Los Angeles, he has had his parents and a large group of friends he has known since their schooldays in Iran.[15] While learning English was difficult for Touraj, he felt like an "American" from the time of his arrival. He attributed this to his more "American personality type."[16] Subsequently, he never felt culturally "out of place."[17] He even reported liking some aspects of American culture more: "everything is so much more organized here," he stated, "People follow the laws, people are good here."[18]

Other barriers such as high education rates and citizenship attainment, English fluency, class status, and communalism are often what keep many immigrants from adapting to every-day life matters in their new countries. Frequently, immigrants do not overcome many of these obstacles. The fact that these first-generation Iranians have achieved all the above is what makes their adaptation to every-day life that much easier. Nonetheless, while they have adapted well, they have a "second nature" in believing their

[15] Touraj R., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Over-the-Phone Interview for Thesis Research. Laguna Beach, California, July 20, 2016.
[16] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.
[17] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.
[18] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.

complete Americanization, and thus do not even realize that many aspects of their cultural "Iranianness" remains. Nonetheless, by and large, most of the first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees retained their culture regardless of their "second nature" belief in their complete Americanization. They manage a mixture of both their Iranianness *and* Americanness: "the old ways are not totally abandoned; rather, the family attempts to blend the best of two worlds and incorporates the old with the new."[19] In order to understand how they have maintained both their Iranianness *and* Americanness, we move on to the discussion of cultural retention.

Despite complete adaptation, there is one aspect that all of the medium and big city first-generation Iranian immigrants participants find non-negotiable: their use of the Persian language. In their article, Mehdi Bozorgmehr and Daniel Douglas found that only 10 percent of the first-generation Iranians speak English at home, while 83 percent state they speak only Persian at home.[20] Language preservation is also another mode of their "second nature": in their every-day lives, they have achieved adaptation but yet, they return home and speak almost exclusively in Persian. Their continued use of the Persian language defines their cultural Iranianness. However, language preservation functions differently as a means of cultural retention for medium and big city first-generation Iranians. While medium city first-generation Iranians still value language preservation, they do not privilege it as the most important force in cultural retention. One medium city first-generation Iranian, Amir B., reported that he only speaks Persian at home with his wife as matter of ease, rather than of cultural preservation: "We never really speak

[19] Jalali, "Iranian Families," 301.
[20] Bozorgmehr and Douglas, "Success(ion): Second Generation Iranian Americans," 17.

English unless we have American friends over so [that] they are more comfortable."[21] Ease of native language in the home is also true for another medium city first-generation Iranian, Sadaf R. who mentioned that when at home, she and her Iranian husband also mainly speak Persian. She added that while it was important for her to teach her children Persian, she was not strict enough. She speaks mainly Persian with her eldest son, while her youngest son has been more resistant to learning the language. She added that she still, at least, speaks "Farsenglish," a mixture of Persian/Farsi and English, with him.[22] But when it comes to cultural practices like Nowruz, Sadaf added that she always celebrates it with her family because "I like it and I want my children to know where they're from and where their ancestors are from."[23]

Because medium city Iranian immigrants are surrounded by a smaller Iranian community in a city that lacks ethnic diversity, they are much more concerned with how they practice and retain their culture. Due to the lack of diversity in Salt Lake City, there is a much greater need here, as opposed to Los Angeles, to proclaim their "Iranianness." Due to the smaller Iranian community in Salt Lake City, they use cultural retention to strengthen their family ties through cultural practices and celebrations – for them, communalism still persists in this regard. For instance, they strengthen family ties during cultural traditions like Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, when gathering together is important and an "expression of the Iranian cultural heritage and national identification."[24] As Avisha S., a medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant stated, these traditions are ingrained. "We all feel a sense of cultural maintenance more so here

[21] Amir B., Oral History Interview.
[22] Sadaf R., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 30, 2016.
[23] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.
[24] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America*, 68.

than we did in Iran," she added, "It's so familiar, it brings you back home and to what you grew up knowing. It's a sense of belonging, friendship, and family. It's culturally valuable."[25] Another medium city immigrant, Lily A., stated that she continues cultural practices such as Nowruz because, "I feel like even to become a new person, you have to integrate well. But to stop everything and lose your identity, then who am I? I have to do these things to continue my identity."[26] Lily added that she always makes it a point to practice Iranian holidays with friends and family. She mentioned that she also makes it a point to distribute food to her community to mark the Day of Ashura, a Shi'a Muslim holiday that marks the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn ibn 'Alī.[27] For medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants, they rely on cultural practices as means of identification among their surroundings and so as to strengthen family and community ties. For them, "The Iranian/Persian spirit of family cohesion is one aspect of the culture that is inculcated into Iranians."[28]

For Avisha who was raised as a Baha'i and entered the country as a religious asylee, it is no surprise that she has managed cultural retention and communalistic traits. In his article, Mohsen Mobasher noted "Iranian ethno-religious subgroups, such as Jewish and Armenian Iranians who were already minorities in Iran, have maintained their ethnicity more than Iranian Muslims who belonged to the majority."[29] Hence, Avisha's persistent cultural retention is no surprise, as she, too, was a minority in Iran.

The high value that medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants place on social prestige and importance of status is another lasting effect of Iranian nationalism.

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[25] Avisha S., Oral History Interview.
[26] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[27] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[28] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 688.
[29] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 105.

The importance of status and prestige emanates from the implications of Iranian nationalism: pride in culture, of pride in the Persian Empire – a culture that, to many Iranians, predates the Arab invasion of the seventh century and ignites nostalgia for when the culture was truly and purely culturally "Persian." Many believed and continue to believe, much like the Shahs did, that Islam is not an "Iranian religion." Instead, it was a religion that infiltrated the pure Persian race and redefined it. In order to get back on the pathway of "Persianization" and "modernization," one needed to become proud of the Iranian culture once again and thus rid the culture of Arab and other outside influences, and thus Iranian nationalism ensued. By emphasizing a "pure" Iranian culture, family status and lineage took on ever-greater importance. Family lines that could be traced back to important Iranian figures brought higher social status. As stated in his article, Ron Kelley remarked, "historically, Iran has been controlled economically by families who traced their lineage back to feudal society."[30] Additionally, "the most revered and respected individuals were descendants of this landed aristocracy."[31]

Cyrus M.'s sense of Iranian identity reflects this linkage between family lineage and social status. He mentioned that his family name is quite prominent in Iran. He beamed as he talked about how his father was an important governor of Isfahan and that it was important for him to remain in Isfahan to get his diploma due to the familial importance in that city.[32] Cyrus also discussed how, as an Iranian, he has always been treated with the utmost respect, regardless of where he goes. In fact, Cyrus told a story of traveling around Europe once and that he had tried to cross the border into Austria without a visa. The worker checking for visas at the border thought that Cyrus was

[30] Kelley, "Wealth and Illusions of Wealth in Los Angeles' Iranian Community," 264.
[31] Kelley, "Wealth and Illusions of Wealth in Los Angeles' Iranian Community," 264.
[32] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.

German and was not going to let him into Austria without a visa, but once the worker found out he was Iranian, he let him in because of his Iranian ethnicity.[33] Cyrus has interpreted this story as proof that being an Iranian confers high social status and thus provides many benefits that those of lesser status may not receive. From the familial pride Cyrus feels, he has retained his Iranian culture strongly, as he stated that he still practices most Iranian holidays, he only speaks in Persian with his family, and he mainly eats Persian food. Aside from Cyrus, how do the medium and big city first-generation Iranians achieve their cultural retention?

Unlike the medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants who use the Persian language more as a convenience, big city first-generation Iranians view the Persian language as most the valuable means of preserving their Iranian culture. Pride in their native tongue and the emphasis they place on teaching their children the language are evident in the interviews. In Maboud Ansari's book, he mentions that out of all the Iranian immigrants he questioned, almost all of them stated they were very concerned with providing their children with an understanding of Iranian culture by "speaking Farsi [Persian] in the homes at all times."[34] For instance, a big city first-generation Iranian immigrant, Hamed E., noted that the most important thing he wanted to pass on to his children was not the teachings of the Iranian culture or traditions, but the language. Hamed added that when his kids were younger, "I would translate English children's books on the fly [into Persian] as I read them." [35] This ensured that they became familiar with the language at a young age and would grow up speaking it. Another big city first-generation Iranian, Latifeh H., places great importance on the Persian language as well.

[33] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[34] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in* America, 106.
[35] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.

She noted that the Persian language was the most important thing to teach her son, much like Hamed with his children. "If you don't know the language, then you lose a lot of the culture,"[36] Latifeh commented. "It also helps in appreciating and knowing where you come from and where your parents come from."[37] To this day, Latifeh said she only speaks Persian with her son, husband, and family. Of speaking Persian with his daughter, Shahram Z. added that "It refreshes my memory [of Persian] and it brings me back – it reminds me of my childhood [in Iran]."[38] According to Bozorgmehr and Douglas, fluency in both languages is even more pronounced among Iranian immigrants due to "the salience of language in the Persian culture and their desire to maintain a connection to their homeland."[39]

Another important aspect to note is that three out of four of the big city Iranian immigrant interviewees are of the Baha'i faith. Because of this, communalism is much more evident among them as the Baha'i faith is, by and large, built up around community events and gatherings. These Iranian immigrants are more involved with their religious community because they "consist of religioethnic minorities…with a long and well-defined history of minority experience."[40] They more heavily rely on their religious identity then on distinguishing themselves through Iranian cultural practices. They have retained communalism much more because of their religious orientation. This allows them to associate, more than anything, with their religion, community, and family.[41] Additionally, these first-generation Iranian immigrants are surrounded not just by their

[36] Latifeh H., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. Santa Monica, California, July 22, 2016.
[37] Latifeh H., Oral History Interview.
[38] Shahram Z., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. First-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. Laguna Beach, California, July 24, 25, and 29, 2016.
[39] Bozorgmehr and Douglas, "Success(ion): Second Generation Iranian Americans," 17.
[40] Bozorgmehr, "Iranians," 227.
[41] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America*, 13.

Baha'i community but with family as well. As noted previously, Hamed E. and Latifeh H. are siblings and live near each other. Touraj R. is near his children, a sibling, and other family members.

As the three Baha'i big city first-generation Iranians have access to a large Iranian community in Los Angeles, it is no surprise that they are more communalistic in nature. It is also no surprise, then, that they also participate in Iranian associations, clubs, and activities – another aspect that strengthens their communal ties. There is some irony that these Baha'i Iranians, who were a minority in their homeland, now maintain a higher level of participation in Iranian organizations and cultural events.[42] Touraj R. stated that he goes to Iranian concerts in Los Angeles often. Hamed E. reported that he attends Iranian lectures, plays, and programs at Stanford University. He also goes to Iranian movies, especially the Iranian Film Festival at the University of California, Los Angeles' campus. Hamed also puts himself on the mailing list for any Iranian events that take place in Los Angeles so he will be notified of them.[43] Latifeh H., probably due in part to her career as a Persian language instructor, reported the most participation in Iranian associations, clubs, and activities. She noted that she is a part of the Middle Eastern Studies Association as well as the International Society for Iranian Studies. She works for the Farhang Foundation which "promotes Iranian culture, history, cinema, and art," where she is a part of two committees – one for the educational part for the Nowruz celebration, and the other part is as a teacher of Persian to young kids.[44] She also attends the Nowruz celebrations at the University of California, Irvine's campus.

As we have seen, although these medium and big city first-generation Iranian

[42] Bozorgmehr, "From Iranian Studies to Studies of Iranians in the United States," 23.
[43] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[44] Latifeh H., Oral History Interview.

immigrants believe they have a "second nature" in their full Americanization, they still maintain their culture and Iranianness through both Westernized, cosmopolitan, and Iranian life structures. It is important to now move onto the second-generation Iranian interviewees to see how these structures have inevitably weaved their way into their lives as well.

Big and Medium City Second-Generation Iranians

Second-generation Iranian interviewees are distinctly different and unique compared to their parents and other first-generation Iranian immigrants in that they reinvigorate their cultural retention, and often invent (or acquire, in the case of some of the medium city second-generation Iranians) it in many ways. They mostly have had typical American upbringings and never faced the challenges of adapting to life in a new land. Many second-generation Iranian-Americans feel that they are stuck "in limbo"; lacking cultural knowledge and unable to speak Persian, they not culturally Iranian enough, but because of physical appearance or name, they are not entirely American either. The way they deal with liminal status is expressed differently by the medium and big city second-generation Iranians. This aspect sets them apart from first-generation Iranians who never mentioned feeling any sense of cultural displacement in their new country. Medium city second-generation Iranians are concerned with retaining or acquiring their cultural "Iranianness" by means of self-education in a city that has a reputation of being mainly White and Mormon. In other words, these second-generation Iranians believe diversity to be lacking and thus they feel a need to identify themselves as distinctly different amongst their surroundings. They also take on roles as educators,

becoming advocates for the Iranian culture to those around them. These second-generation Iranians find the value of self-education in culture in order to maintain their cultural Iranianness.

The big city second-generation Iranians are harder to pin down. They, like their surroundings, are diverse in the way they feel and enact being culturally Iranian. Some of the big city second-generation Iranians are less concerned with the establishment of their "Iranianness" than the medium city second-generation Iranians are. Even so, both groups are focused on the strength of communalism, or the sense of community and family ties, in relation to their cultural identity, regardless of how they exercise their cultural practices and traditions. They also do so in order to be closer to their families and communities. Another thing that both the medium and big city second-generation Iranian interviewees have in common is the importance of passing on the culture to their children – and for many who are younger, future children – as well as their partners and spouses. Although some of the first-generation Iranians reported this as important to them as well, there was a consensus among the second-generation Iranians that this is one of the priorities in their cultural retention. Second-generation cultural retention or acquisition reveals itself through pride in language and cultural traditions received from their Iranian parents, an indirect result of Iranian nationalism. While some scholars have deduced that "first-generation immigrants make a concerted effort to retain some elements of their native culture, the second-generation tries only halfheartedly to adopt its parental culture."[45] This finding may have been true early in the scholarly exploration of second-generation Iranians' cultural retention. However, this is untrue for the medium and big

[45] Ali Akhbar Mahdi, "Ethnic Identity Among Second-Generation Iranians in the United States," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 77.

city second-generation Iranians today. Instead, these second-generation Iranians are finding ways to take cultural retention into their own hands.

It is significant that the first-generation Iranian immigrants' cultural Iranianness has remained alive and has been passed down to their children by way of language preservation, family connections, and Iranian cultural traditions. But unlike their parents who wanted to adapt to America and Westernization, these second-generation Iranians are trying to establish themselves as more Iranian by forming their cultural pride. This is due to either a lack of cultural and language education by their Iranian parents and/or to the exclusion as an identifiable Iranian they feel from their Iranian family members. Many second-generation Iranians feel cultural exclusion because, unlike their parents, they were not born or raised in Iran and thus can never gain a true born-in "culturally Iranian experience," they can never fully understand any of their parents' first-hand experiences. By means of bridging that gap, strengthening family ties by means of culturally educating themselves is important for these second-generation Iranians to understand their parents' culture and to interact with it more fully. This also allows them to become closer to their Iranian family. In a sense, the cultural education is a way to "'get to know' their parents, and the Iran of their parents' youth – a land unburdened for them by notions of Islam, Revolution, and social unrest."[46]

Since most second-generation Iranians speak only English, many of the medium city second-generation Iranians were unable to communicate with their family and they felt excluded from them. Maboud Ansari stated that, "It seems that the phenomenon of language loyalty found in some other immigrant groups has not prevailed among Iranian

[46] Neda Maghbouleh, "'Inherited Nostalgia' Among Second-Generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at Southern California University," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 2 (2010), 209.

immigrant children."[47] This may have been the case in 1992 when Ansari published this book; however, a large shift has occurred in that the second-generation Iranian interviewees noted language loyalty as the main aspect of cultural education. They are so concerned with learning the language as a means of cultural reinvigoration, and as a means to strengthen ties with their family, that three out of the four of the interviewees who are college students are currently enrolled in Persian language courses. This is not surprising; as many scholars have noted that "the college setting encourages a search for roots and sustained identity work."[48] Arezu K., whose father is Iranian and mother is Honduran, noted that she initially started learning the language because "I wished my parents would have taught me more Spanish and Persian."[49] Arezu stated that not knowing the language made her feel ashamed around her Iranian family, it made her feel bad because "that's who I am… and I feel like I'm ignoring a part of it."[50] Arezu wanted to learn the language at school so that when she returned to California on holiday break, she could surprise her father with her language skills. Another second-generation Iranian, Harrison S., stated that he enrolled in a Persian class because he wants to be able to talk to his Grandma and to also "speak with my family members without my dad having to translate."[51] Harrison recalled not knowing the language when he was younger as frustrating as well. He stated, "It's hard to be the only one left out. Learning the language now, though, I can understand it really well and enough to know what's going on."[52] He

[47] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America*, 104-105.
[48] Maghbouleh, "'Inherited Nostalgia' Among Second-Generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at Southern California University," 213
[49] Arezu K., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. Salt Lake City, Utah, June 15, 2016.
[50] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.
[51] Harrison S., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 30, 2016.
[52] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.

added that his family is thrilled he is learning the language and he does not feel left out as much now. Pamela G., the third student in the Persian class, said that her interest in learning was spontaneous. She signed up for the class and ended up loving it. Pamela noted that her father had taught her a mixture of Persian and English when she was younger but she was not able to speak with any of her family. Now that she knows some Persian, she communicates with her father in the language and she talks with her Iranian family much more now.[53] The fourth medium city second-generation Iranian, Taher S., did not learn the language by enrolling in classes. Instead, he learned as a result of being married to an Iranian woman and gained knowledge of the language through spending time with her family. After divorcing from his ex-wife, Taher still continues to speak Persian with his dad now.

Unfortunately for Taher, not all good things have come from his cultural retention and education. For instance, he noted that after learning Persian, he noticed much more discrimination from Iranians because he looks Anglo-American, so they feel he does not fit in well with the Iranian culture. He believes this mindset stems from Iranian pride and the need to look and be ethnically and purely Iranian. At the same time, Taher noted that because of his name, he has experienced a lot of discrimination from Americans, especially after September 11th. Due to this, Taher does not know where he fits in culturally; he added, "Where do I belong in this world? I can't fit in with Iranians and I can't fit in with Americans."[54] But nonetheless, Taher feels a strong connection with Iran and Iranian culture. One day, he hopes to visit Iran because it is the "motherland," he continued, "I have a strong connection [to the country] because of who I am and I want to

[53] Pamela G., Interview with Chelsey Zamir. Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 17, 2016.
[54] Taher S., Oral History Interview.

experience that side of my identity."[55] Taher even advocates for the Iranian culture in his work and personal life by means of educating those around him. He added, "I tell people if they have questions or are interested to learn more, to come ask me. When Nowruz comes around, I send emails to my coworkers that say 'Happy Nowruz,' with a picture explaining the haft sin"[56] (a table set around Nowruz with seven symbolic items that all start with the letter "s," or "sin" in Persian).

To Taher S., continuing Iranian traditions such as Nowruz and setting the haft sin table are important because his father never wanted him to be fully assimilated into American culture "without knowing who we are."[57] Maintaining culture plays a huge role in his family. Pamela G. feels the same way about continuing Iranian cultural traditions and said that "the traditions are fun" but also "it's part of my and my dad's culture."[58] Pamela noted that she returns to California for every Nowruz to spend with her family. Harrison S. stated that these cultural traditions were such a big part of his life growing up and so "being half-Iranian, it's important to stick with traditions because… I feel that if people stop practicing traditions, maybe, it's very easy to lose them and that's just next to what happens throughout history."[59] "For example," Harrison added, "being half-Iranian – my dad's the Iranian one who came to America – and then if my sister and I have children and, you know, we don't marry an Iranian or something, then just over time, we'll lose that."[60] In other words, it is important to hang on to the traditions that are central to being an Iranian – traditions that played an important role in his life growing up.

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[55] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[56] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[57] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[58] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.
[59] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.
[60] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.

For these second-generation Iranians, by taking the initiative to learn the Persian language and investigate and participate in events, they feel like they are no longer ignoring a part of who they are, but in fact embracing it, recapturing, and being advocates for their cultural side. By doing so, these second-generation Iranians are conscious of being uniquely Iranian and identifying themselves as such, inasmuch that the three who started taking Persian classes now have Persian class together and they are now also roommates. By living together, they try to speak a mixture of the language, they listen to Iranian music, and they teach one another about cultural traditions. In this respect, they are insular in their approach to cultural acquisition by fully immersing themselves in it: they educate themselves on the culture, they take Persian language classes, and they primarily spend time with other Iranians. Harrison stated that he and his roommates are even thinking about starting an Iranian club together at their university.[61] They are so proud of their Iranian heritage that even Pamela G., who has a Filipino mother and family, stated that "I'm more interested in Iranian culture in general." All four medium city second-generation Iranians mentioned more interest in learning more about Iran and Iranian culture and thus they have centered their lives on the education of the culture by way of connecting with their families more. This is their form of engaging in communalism. In a way, by educating themselves in the culture and language, these second-generation Iranians are almost "inventing" themselves as culturally Iranian. The medium city second-generation Iranians are dissimilar to the medium city first-generation Iranians in that they take great pride in both cultural practices and language attainment as means of their cultural acquisition. While the medium city first-generation Iranians retain their culture so as to define themselves as Iranians, the second-generation Iranians

[61] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.

culturally retain, or acquire culture, so as to strengthen family bonds and bridge the gap between their sense of being "in limbo."

As mentioned, the big city second-generation Iranians' cultural retention is harder to pin down. They, too, feel "in limbo" and do not feel like they fit in with either their Iranian or American communities. This aspect is very dissimilar to their big city first-generation Iranian counterparts, as some like Touraj R. and Shahram Z. mentioned that they, instead, felt "American" upon arrival and still do.[62] They all echo forms of cultural retention to be closer with their families and communities, but the way they do so varies and is not constant, as are the medium city second-generations' methods. By and large, these big city second-generation Iranians are not as insular as are the medium city second-generation Iranians, but they are still conscious of their cultural roots. For Sarah K., a big city second-generation Iranian, more members of her mother's Mexican family surrounded her than her father's Iranian family. Due to this, Sarah noted that she always felt "in limbo" with her Iranian family and like she did not quite fit in, especially since she does not know Persian. She said that, "I wish I could communicate with my grandparents and aunts more."[63] She also mentioned envy at those more culturally involved in their heritages. Whenever she sees friends who are fluent in Persian, she feels envious and wishes she could have that too: "I'm jealous they know Persian and that they're so involved in the Persian culture."[64] Even though she does practice Nowruz with her father and Iranian family members, seeing them so proud of their cultures makes her want to be around them more and to become more culturally involved. While Sarah's Mexican grandmother did not raise her to be as proud of her Mexican heritage, she

[62] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview; Touraj R., Oral History Interview.
[63] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.
[64] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.

managed to retain a strong pride in her Iranian heritage through witnessing the pride her family has in their Iranian heritage. Sarah noted that when she sees this pride in culture, "I wish I could know the same stories and history that they do."[65] Although Sarah does not educate herself in the history and language, she still manages to maintain a strong sense of cultural pride. MarMar T., another big city second-generation Iranian, who comes from an Afghani mother and an Iranian father, is also proud of her Iranian culture – even more so than her Afghani side. She noted that she loves going to Iranian cultural events more than anything because "I feel that warm feeling that I'm with 'my people.'" MarMar also stated that she was raised speaking the Dari dialect but leans more towards speaking the Iranian Persian dialect. She, too, has been taking Persian language classes so as to better her vocabulary because "I made it my mission to learn for her [MarMar's grandmother]. So now I go to visit her and I'll read to her [in Persian]."[66] But MarMar noted an immense feeling of being "in limbo," culturally, among her family. She stated that when she was growing up, she would always try her hardest to speak in Persian to her parents and they would laugh at her. Now that she is older, she stated her father is the only one laughing and her extended family tells him to teach her correctly. Still, MarMar, much like Sarah K., feels envious towards her peers when she feels she does not know as much about the culture. However, this only encourages her to educate herself and speak to her family about it. Due to the fact that MarMar so heavily identifies as Iranian, even more so than she does as an American or Afghani, it comes as no surprise that she feels she has experienced discrimination, more so than the other two big city second-generation Iranians. She noted that, "I feel like Americans are terrified of anyone who

[65] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.
[66] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.

isn't white… ISIS [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] has created a lot of fear and hate, so discrimination is a way for Americans to protect themselves from what they're afraid of."[67]

The third and final big city second-generation Iranian, Farbod H., is very different from the other two big city Iranians since he is a Baha'i. Again, much like the first-generation Iranian immigrants who are also Baha'i, Farbod explained that he is more involved in Iranian events like going to Iranian films and festivals in Santa Monica. However, Farbod has made a conscious effort to be less insular in his approach to both of his Iranian and Baha'i identities, as opposed to the medium city second-generation Iranians. "I try not to gravitate towards only one group or the other [Baha'i or Iranian]. I try to have a balanced friendship group," he added.[68] He continued, "I like the language and history of Iran, but not the insularity."[69] He referenced insularity as he mentioned that during his childhood, he noticed that many of his friends befriended either only Iranians or members of the Baha'i faith. Instead, Farbod aims for a middle ground concerning both his cultural retention and friendship groups. He does not try too hard to culturally maintain, but he also still celebrates Nowruz and he speaks Persian, especially with his family. For him, the Persian language is his one aspect of cultural retention. Farbod finds language so important that he speaks Persian almost exclusively to his infant daughter in an effort to raise her bilingual. However, when it comes to practicing Iranian cultural traditions, Farbod is not as concerned with them, aside from Nowruz which he mentioned as both culturally and religiously significant to him. For Farbod, his religious identity is,

[67]MarMar T., Oral History Interview.
[68] Farbod H., Second-Generation Iranian Oral History Interview for Thesis Research. Santa Monica, California, July 22, 2016.
[69] Farbod H., Oral History Interview.

by and large, more important than his cultural identity, as he is widely more involved in his Baha'i community than with an Iranian community.

As we have seen, cultural retention or acquisition is a huge part of all of these second-generations' lives, no matter how they decide to interact with it. But one thing that both the medium and big city second-generation Iranians agree on is the importance of passing either cultural traditions or the Persian language – and for some second-generation Iranians, both – onto their children and spouses. The medium city second-generation Iranians feel as Taher S. does when discussing the passing of culture to their children. Taher stated, "I want to keep it [the Iranian culture] around a little bit… but the Persian Empire and the culture and everything is so rich and so different, and it really gave me a different perspective and understanding."[70] The medium city second-generation Iranians, for one, believe that to pass culture on to their children and to educate their spouses and partners in it, they are in a sense being advocates for the Iranian culture and for expanding one's mind. Pamela G. stated that it is important to immerse her partner in Iran's culture and make it a point for them to practice traditions together because "it bothers me when he and his brothers don't know anything about the culture."[71] She feels that people feed from the media and believe that Iran and the people are bad, when she believes quite the contrary: "Once I was there [in Iran], I felt safer in Iran than I do in Los Angeles."[72] By educating their spouses and children on the Iranian culture, these medium city second-generation Iranians feel they can make their spouses and children generally more cultured and educated, instead of allowing them to believe what the media may have to say.

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[70] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[71] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.
[72] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.

As for the big city second-generation Iranians, they do not feel the need to stand up and protect the culture from differing perspectives, naivety, or the media like the medium city second-generation Iranians do. They are advocates, only to a lesser degree, because they too believe that culture is good for making their spouses and children more open-minded. However, because of the social and ethnic diversity that surrounds these big city second-generation Iranians, they come into less contact with naivety and differing perspectives and thus educating those who surround them is not really a priority of theirs. Since Sarah K. enjoys participating in cultural events like Nowruz and seeing the intense cultural pride her family feels, when she does have children, she wants them to participate in her family's Nowruz celebrations as well. MarMar T. noted that passing on cultural traditions is the number one important thing to her. She said, "I would want to pass on everything I could think of. Culture is really important to me. It's the basis of family and the basis of where we came from."[73] As mentioned previously, Farbod may not be as interested in passing on cultural traditions as he is in passing his own religion to his daughter, but one thing that he has found as the utmost important thing, by means of cultural retention, is passing the language on to her.

As seen from the big city second-generation Iranians, they are much unlike the big city first-generation Iranians in that they put more focus on their cultural retention or acquisition, rather than language preservation, as means of strengthening their family ties. While both big city first- and second-generation Iranians mentioned the importance of passing the Persian language on to their children, the big city second-generation Iranians emphasized more importance on passing Iranian culture and history to their children, in addition to language, something that the first-generation Iranians saw as less important

[73] MarMar T., Oral History Interview..

compared to language preservation.

As discussed, these second-generation Iranians believe it is important to maintain culture due to pride, as instituted by Iranian nationalism. From the distinct cultural qualities that they maintain, they are able to contribute more fully to a diverse American culture. Although the way they interact with their cultural retention and reinvigoration of cultural interest is different depending on if they are medium or big city second-generation, they still find culture as important to communalistic ideals like family ties. Due to this, all of the second-generation interviewees stated the importance of educating and passing on culture to either their spouses and/or their children. For these second-generation Iranians, cultural retention is a way of "remembering" Iran, a sense of, "'if we don't remember, who will?'"[74] By passing on culture to their children, spouses, and partners, it is their way of continuing a cultural pride they feel strongly – an Iranian nationalism that reached them through their parents. Due to how aware most of the medium and big city second-generation Iranians are about cultural retention, it should come as no surprise that these Iranians also feel an identity crisis as well which is to be discussed in the following chapter.

[74] Maghbouleh, "'Inherited Nostalgia' Among Second-Generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at Southern California University," 210.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY AMONG FIRST- AND SECOND-GENERATION IRANIANS

Big and Medium City First-Generation Iranian Immigrants

Overwhelmingly, Iranian immigrants everywhere lack a unified sense of identity, but the ways in which they identify differ depending on the cities in which they reside and how they perceive their retention of culture. This section discusses identity between medium and big city first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees. The discussion includes how and why they identify as they do; the terminology they use to identify; how conflicted they feel, or may not feel, about their identities; and how they perceive their belonging, or lack thereof, in the United States. In fact, many first-generation interviewees described a sense of homelessness. This chapter also addresses differences between medium and big city Iranian immigrants and explores how their identification relates to the practice of varying degrees of communalism, as discussed in Chapter 2, along with culture, which all have an effect on how they identify. It is important to note that these Iranian immigrants take into account their American identity as one that plays a purely civic role, distinct from their ethnic identities, but they often enact behaviors that allow them to "fit into America." Aspects of cosmopolitan and modern life structures, such as individualism, also affect the degree of identification. Pride that stems from Iranian nationalism is a central element of cultural retention. It is also important to the

maintenance of Iranian identity. This pride persists so much that first-generation Iranians still cannot relinquish their Iranian identities. Mohsen Mobasher argued that while retention of culture is an attempt to answer the substantive question, "What are we?", identification deals with a much more tenuous concept: "Who are we?" The following chapter explores how both medium and big city first-generation Iranians have tried to answer that question.

Iranian immigrant identity, or lack thereof, stems in large part from the Iranian Revolution and subsequent Iranian diaspora to the United States and elsewhere. Many Americans responded to the Hostage Crisis with anger and even racism and this led to trauma and identity crises for many Iranians abroad. The upheaval provided the "impetus for the birth and popularity of a set of new ethnic labels including Persian, Persian-American, and Iranian-American among Iranians in the United States," as Mobasher observes.[1] Terminology aside, many Iranian immigrants feel proud to be affiliated with the Iranian culture but are "ashamed and embarrassed to be identified with the Iranian national government."[2] They may opt for a much less "threatening and stigmatized identity,"[3] such as the hyphenated identities mentioned above. Iranian immigrant identity demonstrates, decades later, the power of the Shahs' attempt to build a distinctive, non-Arab-influenced ethnic "Iranian" or "Persian" national character through Iranian nationalism.

The impetus for the Shahs' Iranian nationalism is rooted in the distant past: fourteen hundred years ago, when Arab invaders brought Islam to Iran, they overthrew

[1] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 107.
[2] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 100.
[3] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 102.

the Persian Empire and "all the historical books were burned and Iranians were deprived of their own language."[4] Thenceforth, the Persian language was written in Arabic and Islam replaced Zoroastrianism as the state religion. Well over a thousand years later, many Iranians still feel that a part of their true Iranian identity had been lost. As Behnaz Jalali puts it, "Iranians are proud people who believe deeply in their own uniqueness."[5] But at the same time, they have been able to "absorb cultural influences without losing [their] own identity and continuity."[6] One medium city first-generation Iranian, Lily A., said, "the country [Iran] has been under attack so many times and [was] taken over by [so many] different people. So we reshape and readjust."[7] In a sense, when medium city Iranian immigrants identify as Iranians or Persians, they are continuing this same narrative of conquest, upheaval, and through it all, continuity. Many interviewees felt the need to separate themselves from other Middle Easterners, and often the Islamic Republic and its political associations as well, but very much continue to feel a strong sense of pride in identifying as "Iranian."

The medium city first-generation Iranians' focus on identity matches their concern with cultural practices. Some are more adamant about defining themselves as "Persian" rather than as "Iranian." Often, identifying as "Persian," is used "in an effort to conjure up images of the Old Persian Empire and disassociate themselves from the Islamic Republic of Iran."[8] Associating as "Persian" is also a way of "selectively emphasizing the golden age of the Persian Empire before the invasion of Arabs and the

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[4] Laleh Shahideh, *The Power of Iranian Narratives: A Thousand Years of Healing* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004), 56.
[5] Jalali, "Iranian Families," 291.
[6] Jalali, "Iranian Families," 291.
[7] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[8] Bozorgmehr, "Iran," 469.

conversion of Iranians from Zoroastrianism to Islam in the seventh century,"[9] one of the primary ideologies the Shahs promulgated in their Iranian nationalism. Some like Sadaf R., a medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant, feel that many people around them associate every Iranian with Islam, the current Iranian government, or with terrorists. For this reason, Sadaf identifies as "Persian." Sara Madhavi stated in her article, "Because Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent are viewed as outsiders who are presumptively disloyal, racial profiling and discrimination against them becomes acceptable."[10] Madhavi continued, "this has then reinforced the conception of American citizens who are Muslim or of Middle Eastern descent as outsiders who do not 'belong' in the society of the United States population."[11] So it is for Sadaf. She feels the need to separate herself, and her identity, from these associations.

When asked how she identifies, Sadaf stated that she mostly says "Iranian-American," but that "sometimes I say Persian" because "I want to separate myself from Arabs."[12] For Sadaf, this has nothing to do with prejudice; it has more to do with her surroundings. She stated that people in her city lack the knowledge of geography and understanding of where Iran is. If she says she is "Iranian," she noted that many people ask, "Oh, Iraq?"[13] For her, and many other Iranians who feel the same, identifying as a "Persian" allows separation from other countries and also from the Islamic Republic. Indeed many, like Sadaf, feel that they "continue to be regarded in this country by the

[9] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 113.
[10] Sara Madhavi, "Held Hostage: Identity Citizenship of Iranian Americans," *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties & Civil Rights* 11 (2006), 243.
[11] Madhavi, "Held Hostage: Identity Citizenship of Iranian Americans," 243.
[12] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.
[13] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.

politics of Iran rather than their accomplishments in this country."[14] Sadaf characterized the Iranian government as being completely apart from the people: "People are the same as you – they have more similarities to you than their religion or government."[15] Sadaf, as previously discussed, is communalistic in her cultural retention – she continues to practice Nowruz, mainly eats Iranian food, and speaks almost exclusively in Persian with her family, as means of strengthening family ties – it is no surprise that she has maintained a strong sense of "Persian" identity stemming from pride in her culture.

Cyrus, another medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant, expressed similar feelings about identifying himself as distinctly Iranian. Cyrus, like Sadaf, culturally retains in order to strengthen family ties. He too feels the need to disassociate himself from the Islamic Republic, in particular its religious aspects. "Before," he said, "Islam was working. Now Islam is not working. But in Germany, France, and England they recognize that Iran is the same.[16] In the Iranian community worldwide, this sentiment is not rare. Many feel like Cyrus does, and many more take the sentiment further. As Mohsen Mobasher wrote,

> In addition to an increase in the number of non-practicing Iranian Muslims, there is a rise in the number of Iranian-born Muslims who have converted to Christianity or openly condemn Islamic faith as a fanatic religion that is inconsistent with modernity and progress.[17]

Although Cyrus does not take his argument as far as Mobasher, he harkens back to a time when Iran was a more liberal state and harbors negative feelings towards the ideology of the Islamic Republic. Cyrus believes that the Revolution was incredibly

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[14] Mitra Shavarini, *Educating Immigrants: Experiences of Second-Generation Iranians* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 5.
[15] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.
[16] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[17] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 104.

damaging to Iranian people's image: "Before the revolution we were something, after the revolution we were nothing."[18] Cyrus, like many Iranians abroad, counters negative perceptions by focusing on a time when Iran and Iranians were held in the highest regard. And for those like Cyrus who feel a powerful sense of Iranian nationalism, the need to completely disassociate themselves from the Islamic Republic is crucial; "radicalism in anything, I hate," he added.[19] At the same time, maintaining a strong Iranian identity goes hand in hand with how strongly Cyrus clings to his culture. He mentioned, "If I lose my original identity, I am nobody. My original identity can't be changed." As stated in Chapter 2, Cyrus is proud that he comes from a prominent Iranian family and he believes that being an "Iranian" in itself confers high social status. These, on top of cultural pride, are reasons why he culturally maintains: he still practices Nowruz, only speaking Persian at home, and he gave his children only Iranian names.[20] For him, being an Iranian and identifying as such is important not only because it gives him a particular social status, but because it also relates back to the intense pride he feels in being Iranian which his retention of culture demonstrates. As Laleh Shahideh noted best in her book, she described Iranian identity best as "Iran is unique in the sense that its pre-Islamic culture has remained extremely strong and relevant to the Iranian's self-identity and to the conduct of their every day lives."[21]

Like Cyrus, Amir B., a medium city first-generation Iranian immigrant, also feels nostalgic for a time when Iran was heading towards "Westernization," and when being an "Iranian" held a person in such high status all over the world. Amir remembered, "In

[18] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[19] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[20] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[21] Shahideh, *The Power of Iranian Narratives: A Thousand Years of Healing*, 19.

Iran, we had most of the freedoms during the Shah's time."[22] He greatly admired the time in Iran when government had no influence on the religious side of people's lives. Once again, even though Amir disagrees with the Islamic Republic's regime today, he nonetheless, like Cyrus and Sadaf, heavily identifies as an Iranian and has maintained a high level of cultural retention.

Cultural retention is not necessarily synonymous with rejection of the Islamic State or of Islam in general. Lily A., another medium city immigrant, also maintains a high level of cultural retention. But at the same time, Lily is a Muslim and feels that this has been her greatest anchor in both cultural and identity retention. The psychologist Nazanin Saghafi observed that for Iranian Muslims, "whether one is actively engaged with the religion or not, there is less psychological separation between the nation and the religion among Islamic Iranians."[23] This quote is no less true for Lily, as her retention of culture and identification is just as strong as the other medium city first-generation Iranians. As Lily commented when discussing her immigration to the United States, "I was against living abroad and didn't plan to move out of Iran. I wanted to stay there."[24] To this day, of all interviewees, Lily returns to Iran most frequently: "I do go back to Iran, I try to go back every year."[25] It is therefore no surprise that Lily heavily identifies as Iranian.

But while Sadaf and Cyrus felt the need to identify themselves strongly because they believed that the surrounding population did not understand Iranian culture and in fact did not even necessarily know where Iran was, Lily stated that those who surround

[22] Amir B., Oral History Interview.
[23] Nazanin Saghafi, "The Relationship of Religious Self-Identification to Cultural Adaptation Among Iranian Immigrants and First-Generation Iranians," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 43, no. 4 (2012): 332.
[24] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[25] Lily A., Oral History Interview.

her have actually helped reinforce and strengthen her identity. In discussing her Muslim faith she said, "I've had fantastic support from my Mormon friends. They're always there to support me."[26] She feels a connection to the people that surround her, instead of a need to disprove any negative perceptions of Iran and Iranians. She came to Utah and realized that "the people are like us [Iranians], they have the same worries, the same concerns, and the same goals."[27] She still sees herself as very much an Iranian; "The Iranian part of my identity is more significant to me."[28] Nonetheless, Lily is very careful about the terminology she uses to identify herself. She stated her identity as "Iranian" because "ethnically, I'm Persian, but that's not inclusive enough. Iran is a land of multiple ethnicities, you can't say 'Persian' and impose that on a Kurdish person."[29] She continued, "'Iranian' can be associated with more negative things whereas 'Persian' sounds more exotic and less threatening. But I always intentionally say 'Iranian.'"[30]

Avisha S., another medium city first-generation Iranian, much like Lily, is also concerned with the terminology she uses when identifying herself, as both women come from religious backgrounds and have internalized the need to be inclusive. This inclusivity may be seen as a form of communalism that has maintained itself in the way both Avisha and Lily identify, as they are consciously making the decision to compact their identity as one of a group, instead of asserting an individual identity. Avisha stated that she identifies as "Iranian" and not "Persian," because "I see Iranians who are ashamed to say 'Iranian,' but that further stigmatizes Iran. I want Iranians to change that

[26] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[27] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[28] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[29] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[30] Lily A., Oral History Interview.

perception and stop perpetuating that stigma and just be 'Iranians.'"[31] She continued, "'Persian' is more cultural, but 'Iranian' is more historically and culturally accurate."[32] Many like Lily A. and Avisha S. recognize that despite Iran's high degree of religious uniformity, substantial Iranian minorities exist, including "Christian Armenians and Assyrians, Baha'is, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Sunni Kurds," to name just a few.[33] Identifying as they do, these women place more importance on historical and cultural accuracy than they do on disassociating themselves from the religious and political implications of post-Revolution Iran. Despite their need to feel inclusive to such a degree, both women maintain a very high degree of retention of culture and identity, which derives from the pride they feel in their ethnicity and culture.

For these medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants, their American identities are still important, but the American identities take on more civic and individualistic connotations, rather than a sense of being born into a particular group and culture. As Nilou Mostofi puts it,

> Iranians are one example of an immigrant group in the United States who simultaneously identify with their ethnic characteristics and American civic nationalism based on American notions of liberalism, democracy, and laws-proving the possibility of their coexistence.[34]

For Cyrus, moving to the United States was a chance for him to live as an Iranian with freedom, to simultaneously maintain his identity and culture, and to live in a place embodying what pre-Revolution Iran aspired to: freedom and Westernization, just as the Shahs had hoped. Cyrus emphasized freedom as one of the most important components of his American citizenship: "The freedom here is valuable. But many people here don't

[31] Avisha S., Oral History Interview.
[32] Avisha S., Oral History Interview.
[33] Bozorgmehr, "Iran," 469.
[34] Mostofi, Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 682.

appreciate their freedom and don't know what they have."[35] Sadaf R. was practical in her assessment; "America has a lot of things to offer to people. My mom always said that this is the best country you can live in."[36] She continued, "Especially as a woman, I like to be here than anywhere else."[37] Lily A. appreciated both stability and the opportunity for involvement in the political process: "Revolution brings destruction. By participating and being active [in civic duties], you can ask for change."[38] She continued, "People can say what they want and can show dissatisfaction with the establishment – all without bloodshed."[39] Unlike the others, Amir B. sees a different value in his American identification and citizenship. He stated, "As an American, the most advantageous thing is dual citizenship and that I can go back and forth [to Iran]."[40]

Despite their pride in and the practical advantages brought by identifying as both American and Iranian, medium city first-generation Iranians have a sense of "homelessness," or lack of belonging. There is a popular saying in Persian: "kabūtar bā dū bāmeh būdan," or "kabūtar bā dū barjeh būdan."[41] The former translates as "a pigeon with two roofs," and the latter as "a pigeon with two towers." This specific meaning has taken on special context for most, if not all, of the first-generation Iranians I interviewed. Many feel that they are the pigeon that nests (or lives) on two roofs/towers (or two countries). In other words, their home is neither in America – where many have lived longer than in their native land – nor Iran, with many feeling like they are strangers to their homeland and do not really belong there either. Sadaf, for example, who has a

[35] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[36] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.
[37] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.
[38] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[39] Lily A., Oral History Interview.
[40] Amir B., Oral History Interview.
[41] The Library of Congress' transliteration guide was used here in place of the Persian text.

strong sense of identity and strives to mix her Iranian *and* American cultures together, feels a very real conflict between her identities. She said, "Sometimes I feel not American because of my accent and name. But I don't belong in Iran either because I don't relate to them… I'm lost between two countries."[42] Caught in the middle, Sadaf has managed to maintain strong cultural ties while also adopting a mixture of American cultural practices. Cyrus M. demonstrated the personal importance of his high level of retention of culture but acknowledged his in-between status when he declared, "I can't identify one hundred percent as American, but the love of America has become a part of my identity."[43] Amir B. stated that he identifies as "mostly Iranian-American," but feels a definite conflict. "In this society I have to be American," he said, "but at home I am Iranian."[44] Even Lily A., despite the support she mentioned receiving for both her retention of culture and religious practice, noted a significant sense of homelessness. She stated, "I don't fit in completely there [Iran], and when I'm here [Utah], I miss Iran. No matter what, I don't feel complete here either."[45]

Although many of the medium city first-generation Iranians experience a sense of homelessness and identity conflict, Avisha S. displays a very different conflict due perhaps in part to her exile status. As discussed, Avisha is probably one of the most "Americanized" medium city first-generation Iranians in the sense that her adaptation into society has been the most seamless. She has almost no detectable accent, despite the fact that she has only lived in the United States for five years, and has mostly American friends. At the same time, her retention of culture and the reinvigoration of her cultural

[42] Sadaf R., Oral History Interview.
[43] Cyrus M., Oral History Interview.
[44] Amir B., Oral History Interview.
[45] Lily A., Oral History Interview.

education are very high compared to the other medium city Iranians. Avisha feels that she is completely "otherized" in her community, so for her, retention of culture is very important and gives her a sense of belonging. Avisha is a Baha'i religious asylee, and this status, "due to its involuntary nature . . . results in a stronger sense of loss for the homeland."[46] Since Avisha was raised as a Baha'i in Iran, she has felt discrimination most of her life. Now that Avisha lives in a medium city lacking in more wide-ranging diversity, she has internalized her discrimination. Despite the fact that she left Iran to come to the United States for a better life, she still feels discriminated and otherized. Thus, her retention of culture is just as important to her as her need to strongly identify as an Iranian. Most notably, she said, "I act more Iranian here than I would in Iran," and she emphasized that "I'm more Iranian than American."[47] Even given the differences between the interviewees' personal experiences, the feeling of being "a pigeon with two nests" seems the main reason for so many of the examined first-generation Iranian immigrants' strong cultural ties in relation to their sense of identity.

Perhaps in an attempt to resolve the feeling of homelessness, national pride, as mentioned above, plays a significant role in how these medium city Iranian immigrants identify. None of the interviewees have truly relinquished identifying as an "Iranian," or as a "Persian." Establishing identity is particularly crucial in a semi-isolated immigrant community whose "in-group relations lack frequency and duration."[48] Hence, they feel the need to strongly identify themselves in their surroundings, just as they seek to do with their retention of culture, for fear that their true identities and cultures will slip away. Consequently, for these Iranian immigrants, identity is inextricably linked with their

[46] Bozorgmehr, "Iranians," 227.
[47] Avisha S., Oral History Interview.
[48] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America*, 71.

retention of culture and how they identify, even though they have lived in the United States as long as, or longer than, they ever lived in Iran. It is thus vital to study how much cultural retention can play a part in connection with how strongly they do identify. Paradoxically, then, this "inextricable" aspect also requires constant cultural upkeep.

The big city first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees' identities similarly align with retention of culture: just as they are less concerned with cultural practice and the continuance of traditions, they are also less concerned about their identification. Due to their position in a large population of Iranians and plenty of diversity, they do not feel the need to uniquely identify nor stand up against negative or naive perceptions of Iranians. Such concerns are simply not called into question where they reside. They do not find it important to define and identify themselves as distinctly Iranian – there is simply less of a need to proclaim their Iranianness in Los Angeles, as it is more important in Salt Lake City. In this way, the big city first-generation Iranian interviewees feel differently about their own identification and "homelessness" compared to the medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants. Nonetheless, the big city first-generation Iranians' retention of culture still remains consistent. Most of these first-generation Iranian immigrants still acknowledge their Iranian nationality and it remains important to their identity. But much of the difference in attitudes may have to do with the fact that three out of four of the big city first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewees are Baha'i. In this, faith and association with specific nationalities is often unimportant. Instead, these Baha'i big city first-generation Iranians seek out more of a "middle ground" identification. For instance, one big city first-generation Iranian, Touraj R., identified himself more in line with his Baha'i faith and the belief in unity of humankind.

Therefore, identification with a certain nationality is not as common among many Baha'is. Touraj stated that, "I define myself as a human being. I'll say I was born in Iran, I live in the United States, and I love the world."[49] However, much unlike the medium city first-generation Iranians, he added that if he must identify as something, "I say 'Persian,' though, because it's more poetic. It connotes Persians and Greeks. Iran after the revolution is just associated as political fanaticism."[50] As noted above, identifying as "Persian" among many Iranian immigrants is not uncommon. Although Touraj does not feel the need to distinctly identify, he believes in the importance of maintaining culture due to his pride in where he comes from: "I wake up for Nowruz because it's ingrained in me, however meaningless it may be. I find things that I love and am proud of in every culture."[51] Interestingly, even though Touraj's cultural retention is an aspect of communalism – he takes pride in maintaining his language by means of strengthening ties with family and friends, as discussed – the way he, and the other big city first-generations, identify is, in fact, a feature of individualism and, of course, his faith.

Much like Touraj, Hamed E., another Baha'i big city first-generation Iranian, reported that he appreciates more of a mixture, or middle ground, for his identity. When asked how he identifies, he stated his identity as "Iranian-American."[52] In reference to wanting a "middle ground" of identification, he added, "Sometimes it's like you want pieces of both [identities], you survive on both [identities]."[53] Hamed, like Touraj, is not concerned with the terminology he uses, as he said he often describes himself as

[49] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.
[50] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.
[51] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.
[52] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[53] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.

"Persian." He added, "If you go back thirty-forty years, people said 'Persian' more. 'Persian' is just better known." Once again, the Shahs' identity program shows its impact.

Latifeh H., another big city first-generation Iranian immigrant, emphasized her Iranian identity, more so than Touraj and Hamed did. Even though she is a Baha'i, her closer association with an Iranian identity and high level of retention of culture most likely stem from her job as an instructor of the Persian language. Additionally, she is very active in Iranian organizations and cultural activities. Nonetheless, she also identifies as "Iranian-American" and is more conscious of the terminology she uses in her identification. She mentioned that terminology in stating "'Iranian' has become standard" now as opposed to the culturally and historically exclusive "Persian."[54] Latifeh is very proud of her culture and described feeling a duty to pass the Iranian language on to her son as one of the most important cultural aspects. But even in this example, Latifeh showed more of the characteristic big city inclusiveness: passing Iranian culture on to her son, she thought, would make him worldlier. Latifeh felt the same way regarding her own identification and added that she benefits from both cultures and thus identifies as both Iranian and American. "It makes you more sophisticated because you carry both cultures rather than just one. It gives you an open-mind and open world view."[55] This, too, is a very Baha'i-like mindset in that being worldlier is appreciated just as much as diversity is.

Shahram Z., the last big city first-generation Iranian immigrant interviewed, takes pride in his Iranian heritage just as the others. He declared that, "I consider myself

[54] Latifeh H., Oral History Interview.
[55] Latifeh H., Oral History Interview.

American-Iranian, or Iranian-American. I'm always Iranian and that's where I'm from."[56] Like other big city Iranians, Shahram, too, maintains his language as a means of retaining her culture. But he also demonstrates a different side of the Shahs' attempts, as he *feels* more American than Iranian – more "Westernized." He espouses more individualism than the other big city Iranians, who are more communal. He projects a much more Westernized sensibility than the other interviewees, has stopped practicing many cultural traditions, and stated that he associates more with other Americans than he does with Iranians. Like Latifeh, Shahram is a little more conscious of the terminology he uses to identify himself, but he does not give it much thought other than to mention, echoing Sadaf R. and other medium city interviewees, "I say 'Iranian' … not 'Persian.' I used to say 'I'm from Persia,' because Iran was in the news. I'm okay with 'Iranian' now though."[57]

Although many of the big city first-generation Iranians interviewed maintain a high degree of cultural retention and take pride in their heritage, many, like Shahram, noted a strong association with their American identities. Their association with their American identities takes on individualistic and civic connotations. Touraj R., for instance, added that he identified with being "American" when he first arrived in the United States. Touraj recalled, "I was quite at home when I got here [to the United States]. I could never survive in Iran as a professional… Here, I am able to be more compatible with the American business mindset."[58] Big city Iranian immigrants like Touraj feel that their personalities are more compatible with Americans' personalities, and thus their identification becomes more effortlessly "American-Iranian," which is

[56] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview.
[57] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview.
[58] Touraj R., Oral History Interview.

much more common among this immigrant group. Much like Touraj, Shahram added that, "I'm an American born in Iran… But if someone asks where I'm from, I'll say I was born in another country [meaning Iran]."[59] Hamed expressed much the same sentiments as Touraj and Shahram. When asked what aspects he liked about being an American citizen, he said, "being independent and individualistic stand out. Persian culture is more of a group mentality, Americanness is individual – I prefer it somewhere in the middle." Mixing individualism with communalism again shows itself in how Hamed retains culture by maintaining the language and cultural traditions like Nowruz. At the same time, Hamed noted that he "relates much better to people who want to mix. I like a mixture of both Iranian and American cultures."[60] Latifeh, despite her pride in Iranian culture and identity, is happy to live in the United States and to be an American citizen, especially as a woman. She said, "I feel for the younger generations, for the women [in Iran]."[61] This sentiment is familiar for many Iranian women in the United States, as Iranian-American women today have managed to "break away from the delineated real and symbolical gendered spaces of oppression in their homeland as well the communal sense of marginality of exilic conditions, and have managed to assume successful professional standing in the United States."[62] All the first-generation interviewees, like Avisha S., Sadaf R., and Lily A., shared this sentiment and also mentioned women's expanded opportunities as one of the main reasons they are happy to live in the United States.

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[59] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview.
[60] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[61] Latifeh H., Oral History Interview.
[62] Katharine Kia Tehranian, "Inhabiting Her Space," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 3 (2006), 425.

Due in part to the lack of importance many of these big city first-generation Iranians put on identification and the terminology thereof, it is not surprising that many reported feeling no conflict between their identities. Rather, they, again, stress finding a middle ground of identification and retention of culture as far more important. Hence, conflict between identities does not arise very often. For instance, Touraj R. did not note any conflict in his identities. Instead, he mentioned that he largely associates himself as an "American." However, when it comes down to the people he surrounds himself with, the food he eats, and the traditions he practices, he reveals himself as someone who has strong Iranian cultural pride. Hamed did not see his identity as conflicted at all, and said rather, "It's nice to be able to pick and choose and not see yourself only as just 'this' or 'that.'"[63] He continued, "That's another nice ability of being an American too, you have to ability to pick and choose all sorts of different things. It's easier … you don't have to conform to one culture, to one thing. It's freeing."[64] This is related to Hamed's Baha'i beliefs, which emphasize cultural plurality and fluid identity. Nonetheless, Hamed still finds value in maintaining culture and not completely relinquishing his Iranian identity. Shahram said, "I consider myself 'American-Iranian,' or 'Iranian-American'… But I've lived here [United States] for a lot longer than my own country."[65]

Despite the middle ground many of the big city first-generation Iranians seek to find in their identities, they too describe the feeling of being "a pigeon with two nests." This sense of homelessness, as with the medium city Iranian immigrants, influences how they culturally attain. Despite Hamed E.'s feelings of wanting a mixed culture and identity, he still stated, "I don't feel like I fit in anywhere… I don't feel attached or

[63] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[64] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[65] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview.

grounded. I don't feel that way about Iran, but I don't think I want to live there."[66] He continued, "It's the heart and the mind of feeling homeless."[67] It is no wonder that he, as mentioned previously, is very active in Iranian organizations and events and feels proud of maintaining the Persian language to strengthen family and friendship ties.

Perhaps for the same reason, Latifeh H. seeks more cultural retention and more heavily identifies as an "Iranian" than the other Baha'i big city first-generation Iranians; she, too, feels a sense of homelessness. When discussing her identity, Latifeh stated, "I have lived here longer than I did in Iran. I belong to this country. I don't want to live in Iran anymore." But, at the same time, she said, "We [first-generation Iranian immigrants] are stuck in the middle. We are neither Iranian nor American."[68] In line with the sense of homelessness, Shahram Z. also stated, "I'm an American born in Iran. I'm Americanized… But if I ever go to Iran, then I'm Iranian because I can't go to Iran and say I'm American. I'm not one-hundred percent Iranian or American."[69] He continued, "I'm a person that feels not completely American, but I'd never fit in in Iran. But I feel more at home here because of the equality and the democracy."[70] Despite his feelings of complete Americanization, even Shahram feels stuck in the middle – like "a pigeon with two nests."

All in all, the first-generation immigrants feel as a "pigeons with two nests." And they have all maintained at least a degree of their Iranian identities and culture, some more strongly than others – the medium city immigrants more distinctly than the big city first-generation Iranian immigrants. As Mitra Shavarini summarized in her book about

[66] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[67] Hamed E., Oral History Interview.
[68] Latifeh H., Oral History Interview.
[69] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview.
[70] Shahram Z., Oral History Interview.

the Iranian immigrant position: "As Iranians, they are proud of their heritage; as Americans, they feel entitled to this nation; and as immigrants, they believe they have to work hard to prove themselves."[71] And for all the first-generation interviewees, the most common thread uniting their sentiments and experience, the most common way in which they choose to cope with the persistent sensation of homelessness, is through the Iranian nationalism that the Shahs promoted during much of the twentieth century. But what of the second generation?

Big and Medium City Second-Generation Iranians

This next section discusses identity among medium and big city second-generation Iranian interviewees. Much like the first-generation Iranian immigrants, these second-generation Iranians also lack a unified national identity. But first-generation immigrants, however adrift, seem able to cling to a core of Iranian identity, largely shaped by the Shahs' twentieth-century betterment and modernization program, alongside Iranian nationalism, in pre-Revolutionary Iran. Second-generation immigrants, by contrast, are overwhelmingly reluctant to identify as either totally "Iranian" or totally "American." Just as the first-generation Iranians, the second-generation Iranians see their Americanness as a civic identity. If they reject their Americanness, as we will see with MarMar T., then it is done in a way to show their disagreement with American politics. As Ali Akhbar Mahdi points out in his look at Iranian ethnic identity nationwide, out of all the second-generation Iranians who took part in his study, only 16.2 percent identified themselves as "American," 17.7 percent identified as "Iranian," but 61.6 percent

[71] Shavarini, *Educating Immigrants: Experiences of Second-Generation Iranians*, 6.

identified as "Iranian-American."[72] Using Mahdi as a starting point, this section explores in detail just how they identify and why they identify as they do; the terminology used; and the conflict of identities and the sense of belonging, or lack thereof, that these children of immigrants feel.

Second-generation Iranians in the United States do not feel like "a pigeon with two nests," or a lack a sense of homelessness, much unlike the first-generation Iranians. But they distinctly feel a lack of belonging. Just as they had a sense of being "in limbo" culturally, their identification shows the same uncertainty. But second-generation Iranians' identity, just like their cultural retention, is not static. These second-generation Iranians form their own ideas of how they identify and they often "invent" their identification, as stressed by the importance they place on their cultural retention or acquisition. The differences between medium and big city second-generation Iranians will be addressed in regard to their identification and how it relates to varying degrees of communalism, or a sense of community – as discussed before, they all express communalism through their cultural retention – and individualism and culture, which all have an effect on how they identify. The continuation and importance of pride, as with all discussions thus far, maintains its prominence here as well. For these second-generation Iranians, trying to establish "Who are we?" is not as easy as establishing "What are we?" as it was for the first-generation Iranians.[73]

Without ever openly stating it, medium city second-generation interviewees gave the impression that they can become more culturally Iranian of their own volition through cultural retention and self-education. This is seen in the previous chapter as evidenced

[72] Mahdi, "Ethnic Identity Among Second-Generation Iranians in the United States," 83.
[73] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 114.

from their own cultural behavior. They feel and believe that their families and communities do not see them as identifiably "Iranian" because they were either not born in Iran, or they do not look Iranian enough. They therefore feel an identity crisis, and thus try to "fit in" more by bridging the gap through means of cultural and language retention. By doing so, they are able to engage in communalism and strengthen their family, as well as their identity, ties.

How the medium city second-generation Iranians deal with this identity crisis is by defining themselves culturally so as to present themselves as uniquely Iranian amongst their surroundings. Recall Taher S., who, as discussed in Chapter 2, is very focused on his cultural retention: he knows the Persian language, practices Nowruz every year, and stated an interest in passing on the language and culture to his future children. However, since he grew up with a Muslim father and a Mormon mother, he has felt an identity crisis all his life. Taher added that he has been trying to figure out where he fits in in the world and that he has been consistently confused about his identity. He nonetheless feels a strong connection to Iran as the "motherland," and expressed hopes to visit Iran one day because of its "strong connection and identity to who I am and I want to experience that side of my identity."[74] Altogether, though, Taher does not think about how he identifies too much. Instead, he puts more thought into being an advocate and educator for the Iranian culture, which is something he thinks more about than his identity. His stated hope is to educate those around him on all cultures, in hopes that the discrimination and lack of belonging he has felt will be lessened for those in the future: "If I can reach just one person, then I have done my job."[75] For Taher, identity itself is less important than its

[74] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[75] Taher S., Oral History Interview.

implications.

Others like Arezu K., another medium city second-generation Iranian, grew up with relatively few Iranian influences. Once she entered college, she truly started exploring her Iranian identity and making more of an effort to establish herself as such. Arezu has a Honduran mother and an Iranian father and growing up in California, she was raised in an area populated mainly with other Latinos. Arezu stated that due to this, she identified mainly as a Hispanic growing up, but then once she came to Salt Lake City for college, she realized that "there's more to me than just one part and one ethnicity."[76] She has always taken pride in practicing cultural traditions like Nowruz with her family. But ever since moving to Salt Lake City and attaining more Iranian culture through learning Persian, living with two other second-generation Iranians, and joining a Latina sorority, Arezu has made a concerted effort to surround herself with both sides of her ethnicity. Due to this, she noted that she identifies herself as multiracial and as "equal parts American, Hispanic, and Iranian."[77]

Harrison S., another medium city second-generation Iranian, has had more Iranian cultural influences growing up and has even been to Iran on several occasions. Therefore, he expressed a stronger identification as an Iranian: "I am proud to say I'm Iranian, or half Iranian."[78] Pamela G., another second-generation Iranian born and raised in Los Angeles but currently living in Salt Lake City for college, said that her cultural retention and Iranian identity is stronger in her current residence, as she feels more of a need to identify herself culturally here than she did in Los Angeles. This has a lot to do with the fact that, as previously mentioned, Pamela has several second-generation Iranian friends

[76] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.
[77] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.
[78] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.

in Salt Lake City – Harrison S. and Arezu K. are also her roommates – which has helped strengthen her Iranian identity. But, like Arezu, Pamela is grappling with her multiple hyphenated identities and she relates more with their struggle for identification and cultural retention. Pamela, too, has a strong Iranian influence in her family. As previously mentioned, she practices all of the Iranian cultural traditions and holidays with her family, and has also been to Iran on several occasions, but she has had less Filipino influences growing up. Consequently, Pamela's identity is not as fluid as Harrison's. When asked about how she identifies, Pamela stated, "It changes with who[m] I talk to… Like my boyfriend's family who are really American, I like to push that I'm more Iranian-Filipino." When she is around more Iranians, she noted, "I push my American identity more."[79] What is consistent among these second-generation Iranians is that none relinquishes identifying as "Iranian," and all have made a concerted effort to maintain their cultural practices in Salt Lake City. They evidently find it extremely important to maintain cultural practice, but their Iranian identities vary depending on how "culturally Iranian" they feel. For them, the more culturally Iranian they are, the less likely they are to feel ambivalence in their identities.

Therefore, "Iranianness" may be a function of cultural retention and surroundings. In contrast, many of the medium city second-generation Iranians associate their "Americanness" more from a perspective of civic identity. In other words, what does American identity *do* for them? Taher S. noted that he does not place his American identity as the most important aspect of how he identifies. Instead, aspects of his civic American identity are extremely important to him. For instance, Taher mentioned, "I was able to demonstrate in front of the White House for important issues; these things are

[79] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.

great because we have the freedom to do that."[80] Harrison stated, despite the pride he feels in identifying as an Iranian, "I consider myself more American, even though I have dual citizenship, but since I've lived here all my life and culture-wise, I'm American-Iranian."[81] For Harrison, pride in his American civic identity comes primarily from being able to identify as a mixed-race person: "The 'melting pot' is central to being American… There's no true ethnic American identity, 'American' is everyone that lives here, regardless of culture, ethnicity, and religion."[82] Pamela expressed similar feelings of civic pride, that being American is "being open-minded because it is a free country and you can speak any language, practice any religion… America is a melting pot and that's the way it's supposed to be. 'Americanness' is freedom."[83] Pamela's quote truly encompasses both first- and second-generation Iranians' feelings about their American civic identities. But in a sense, the second-generation Iranians absorb their American civic identity, and almost take its freedoms for granted; whereas the first-generation Iranians had to construct aspects of their Iranian identity: freedom was and is the reason they live here – they can be both Iranian *and* American in the United States, a freedom that was perhaps lacking in their lives in Iran. For the first-generation Iranians, their American identities allow them to be two things at once, something that may not have been possible in their pasts. But much like the first-generation Iranians, these second-generation Iranians, as American citizens, have had to construct their Iranian identities, bringing with it a sense of non-belonging and crises.

Overall, these second-generation Iranians place more importance on their cultural

[80] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[81] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.
[82] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.
[83] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.

retention or acquisition than they do on the terminology they use to define themselves. Their identification terms tend to be more fluid and less thought out than their cultural practice. Taher's identity, like that of most of the medium city second-generation Iranian interviewees, fluctuates on a day-to-day basis and that it mostly depends on whom he is talking with. He said that if he is with Iranians who speak poorly of the United States, then he feels the need to defend the United States. In those instances, he feels more like an American. In contrast, Taher mentioned another conflict he got into with an army recruiter, where he felt more "Iranian." The recruiter told him that if he were to join the army, "he could kill Arabs and Iranians."[84] In occurrences like these, Taher feels more "Iranian" and more of a need to defend Iran. This is when his "Persianness comes out more."[85] As for Arezu K., she feels a stronger identity crisis than the others. She believes that if one's level of cultural retention is not strong, than neither is their identity as an Iranian. Thus, she does not put too much thought into the terminology she uses to identify; instead, she uses terms of convenience. When asked how she identifies, Arezu said she defines herself as "Persian… because that's how my dad told me to associate as."[86] "Persian" is simply easier. "I would tell people I'm Iranian and people would say, 'Oh you mean I-ran?'"[87] So now she identifies herself mostly as a "half-Persian." Additionally, both Pamela and Harrison are very aware of the terms they use to describe themselves – much more so than either Taher or Arezu. This, perhaps, may also have to do with the fact that they have had more Iranian family involvement and are thus more sensitive to different terminologies. When Pamela was asked about whether she prefers to

[84] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[85] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[86] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.
[87] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.

identify as "Iranian" or "Persian," she remembered, "When I was growing up, I'd say Persian because it sounded nicer… But one day I decided I'm not embarrassed to say 'I'm Iranian.'"[88] Harrison said, "Sometimes I say both [Persian and Iranian] because of how I was raised." Like Arezu's, his father would often say, "People will understand you more if you say 'Persian.'"[89] But Harrison's understanding of the terminology is much more different, as he stated, "That [identification of 'Persian'] can't be the case for everyone, because there are different cultures in Iran and you can't say 'Persian' because that excludes [many of] them."[90]

As mentioned, many of these medium city first-generation Iranians experience strong identity crises. On the surface, Taher S. seems able to juggle his dual identity. He speaks Persian, practices many of the Iranian cultural traditions, and identifies as an "Iranian," but describes himself as still proud to be an American. However, he noted a strong sense of identity crisis between both identities because of past discrimination he experienced from both sides. He said that many Americans have discriminated against him because he has a "Middle Eastern sounding name," and he often gets "randomly selected for searches at the airport."[91] At the same time, since he looks more "American" he does not fit in with the Iranian community. Taher mentioned a story of being around two Iranians who were speaking in Persian. Since he speaks Persian fluently, he understood that the pair were making fun of him. As soon as he responded to them in Persian, they were taken aback. Despite his cultural and linguistic retention, his belonging is in question so much that he asks himself "Who am I? Where do I belong in

[88] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.
[89] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.
[90] Harrison S., Oral History Interview.
[91] Taher S., Oral History Interview.

this world? I can't fit in with Iranians and I can't fit in with Americans. I'm an outcast."[92] But Taher is not just trying to become more "American" or "Iranian." His experiences have prompted him to try to educate the people around him, open minds, and maybe even create a world where future generations will not experience the same discrimination and resulting identity crises.

Even though Arezu K. identifies as an Iranian, Hispanic, and American, she does not feel like she fully fits into one group or the other, though at times she feels more American than any other part of her identity. She said, "I'm ambiguous looking, but if I were to go to Iran or Honduras, then I would be an outcast because I didn't grow up there." Even though Arezu still practices Nowruz with her family and has taken it upon herself to learn the language, she feels an identity crisis. She did not grow up with too many cultural influences, even within her own family. Many first-generation immigrants, like Arezu's father, believe that because their children "have no future in Iran, it is better for them to grow up as American and feel American."[93] In consequence, she stated "I thought I was doing fine with being half Persian," but "now living with my Persian roommates, I think 'wow, I guess I didn't really know much.'"[94] As mentioned before, her roommates have been to Iran, and they know a lot about Iranian music. Surrounded by friends with more Iranian cultural knowledge than her has led her to reflect that had she grown up with similar cultural influences in her life, then she might identify more as an Iranian.[95]

Pamela G. and Harrison S., on the other hand, had more childhood Iranian

[92] Taher S., Oral History Interview.
[93] Ansari, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America*, 108.
[94] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.
[95] Arezu K., Oral History Interview.

influences and thus their identity crisis, while still evident, is less so than Arezu's. While both Pamela and Harrison experienced identity crises because they could not communicate with their family members growing up, the way they have tried to bridge that gap is to self-educate and teach themselves about the culture and language. Harrison, in particular, who is able to communicate with his Iranian family members now that he knows more of the Persian language, said they have largely been supportive of his cultural acquisition. His knowledge of the Persian language has softened his sense of identity crisis. Both Pamela's and Harrison's fathers have encouraged and maintained cultural practices at home, and taken each of them to Iran on several occasions. Due to their more extensive family involvement, they both identified more strongly as Iranians. And as mentioned, Pamela's identity crisis is not as strong in Salt Lake City as it is in Los Angeles. In fact, she identifies more as a Filipino in Los Angeles, as more Filipinos than Iranians surround her there. In Salt Lake City, among other second-generation Iranians and without a strong Filipino presence, she identifies more as an Iranian. However, Pamela experiences tension between her Filipino, Iranian, and American identities, which all intensifies her sense of identity crisis. She explained, "I'm really conflicted. I am an American, but I don't want to forget about my ethnic sides."[96]

But cultural retention or acquisition and the presence of other Iranian immigrants is not enough to resolve identity crisis. Like Taher, both Pamela and Harrison noted that they feel a sense of exclusion from their Iranian family and communities often because they do not look "Iranian enough." This is fairly common. As Nilou Mostofi wrote, "Iranian-Americans reconstruct their public persona or outer identity [appearance] to

[96] Pamela G., Oral History Interview.

facilitate the process of assimilation."[97] But what price do they pay at home? While neither Pamela nor Harrison mentioned that they wish they looked more "Iranian," they both stated that because they do not look "Iranian enough," this contributes to a feeling of being "not Iranian enough," a conflict of identities.

Although the medium city second-generation immigrants all reported feeling a lack of belonging – an identity crisis – that does not stop them from taking pride in their parents' culture and from working hard to learn Iranian language, cultural traditions, and history. Far from it, actually. On the contrary, they practice modes of communalism so as to bring them closer to their families and gain acceptance as "real" Iranians. Language in particular is "indicative of retention of ethnic identity."[98] All the second-generation medium city interviewees have learned Persian and reported speaking it with their families. But although they work hard to attain culture and identification as Iranians, they still appreciate some aspects of individualism as seen through their American identities. These second-generation Iranians remain proud of both their Iranian *and* American identities and refuse to relinquish either aspect. As the same could be said of the medium city first-generation Iranians, the medium city second-generation Iranians are much different in that they have to earn their "Iranianness," but they never feel like they can fully attain the acceptance they so dearly want. Try as they might through their cultural efforts and self-education, they still feel a lack of belonging.

Just as the big city second-generation Iranians are harder to pin down culturally, their identities are tricky to pin down as well. However, the degree to which big city second-generation Iranian interviewees become involved in cultural identification

[97] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 694.
[98] Bozorgmehr and Sabagh, "High Status Immigrants: A Statistical Profile of Iranians in the United States," 23.

matches the degree to which they identify. Due to the diverse culture that surrounds them, the identity crisis they feel is not as strong as it is among the medium city second-generation Iranians. Similarly, their will to self-educate and become more definitively culturally Iranian is not as strong. But big city second-generation Iranians are still not completely at ease in their identities. We move on next to examine how the interviewees describe themselves, and the terminology they use to define their identity.

Sarah K. is of Iranian and Mexican descent and despite being less culturally involved in her Mexican heritage than with the Iranian side, she identifies as "Persian and Mexican." Even though she was not raised to "soak in the Mexican culture," she still feels "proud [about her identities]. And I feel like I get that proudness from my Persian side."[99] She stated her reasoning as, "I am proud of who my parents are… I'm proud to be Persian and enjoying the culture, and I'm proud to be Mexican and seeing how far our history has come."[100] MarMar T. is a different story, for her pride is not enough by itself. Intent as she is on acquiring culture, she is just as concerned about identification, more so than Sarah. MarMar does not fit the pattern of the other second-generation interviewees, medium or big city, in that she did not have a large amount of Iranian influence growing up, despite having an Iranian father and Afghani mother. In spite of this absence, or perhaps because of it, she maintains culture eagerly and finds importance in identifying strictly and uniquely as Iranian: "If I could, I would just want to be full 'Iranian.' I wouldn't even put 'American' in there because I'm disappointed in what is going on in the world right now."[101] As we saw in Chapter 2, MarMar's father has mostly been resistant against her cultural practice and education, thus creating a feeling of being

[99] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.
[100] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.
[101] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.

culturally "in limbo" and not knowing where she fits in with even her own family. However, as enthusiastically proclaiming herself as an Iranian, and thus negating her American identity, MarMar convinces herself of her own belonging with her Iranian family and community. In a sense, her practice creates actually *being*. It is no wonder that when referencing Iranians, she always uses the pronoun "we." Perhaps more surprisingly, even though her mother is from Afghanistan, MarMar admitted to never identifying as "Afghani" because "I don't understand the culture as much."[102] Nor is she nearly as interested in doing so as she is in developing her Iranian identity. MarMar is quite the outlier among her second-generation Iranian peers as she seeks to invent herself as an identifiable Iranian. She asserts herself as such to be the Iranian she feels people will not allow her to be. Much like the medium city second-generation Iranians who utilize education to "invent" themselves as culturally Iranian, MarMar does the same thing with her identity.

While MarMar T. has adopted Iranian identification as a means of defining her place of belonging amongst her family and community, Sarah K. identifies as "Iranian" or "Persian" because she is proud of her family's culture and takes great joy in being able to associate herself with it. These two have taken a much more communalistic stance in their identification – as means of identifying with their family and heritage. The last big city second-generation interviewee, Farbod H., takes on a more individualistic stance in his identification. Farbod was raised as a Baha'i and still practices the faith. He believes, as do other Baha'is, in the unity of humankind and to some extent minimizes the importance of national identity. While the first-generation Baha'i interviewees mention a degree of identity conflict, it stems more from a sense of homelessness. It does not

[102] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.

necessarily center on how much they associate with the terminology or importance of identity itself. Thus, asking a person of the Baha'i faith how they identify and if they are conflicted between their identities can often be tricky. Farbod, who was born and raised in the United States, does not mention a feeling of homelessness. He also does not attend as many cultural events as the other second-generation Iranians do. Not only is Farbod separate from some of the same concerns as his fellow second-generation immigrants, he is more separated from participation as well. As a result, his sense of identity is uncertain and fluid. Farbod said, "I don't identify myself as anything. That doesn't feel natural to me. Identification with specific groups and saying 'Iranian-American' feels too defining."[103] He continued, "I just feel like a human being immersed in certain types of culture but that doesn't define me as a human being. It's part of who I am, not what I am."[104] Farbod believes that identity is intrinsically tied to the question of "What are we?" as he believes all aspects of his life play a role in defining "Who are we?" such as his religion, culture, and identity. In contrast, the other second-generation interviewees believe that their identities define only "Who are we?" as answering this question, and establishing their identities, subsequently strengthens the relation to their Iranian families and community to better fit in and belong.[105] For them, "What are we?" is made up only of the cultural events and self-education they take on themselves.

The medium city second-generation Iranians are also just as variable concerning their American identity as they are with their Iranian identity. They are not as consistent in maintaining a pride in civic American identity as the medium city second-generation

[103] Farbod H., Oral History Interview.
[104] Farbod H., Oral History Interview.
[105] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 114.

Iranians are, but some still maintain the feeling to some degree. Farbod H. said that "Americanness" to him is a "way of being." One can "come here and make their way."[106] He mentioned, "I have an affinity for living here, though, especially when I think about living elsewhere. It's [the United States] a mess in its own way, but it feels like it's 'my mess.'"[107] MarMar T., as we have seen, does not even want to associate with being an "American." She reluctantly admitted, "We have equal rights in America, even though I can't agree with that right now… I can't speak good about it," and added, "Iranians have never started any war, we accepted people and were so giving and giving. America is a lot of taking and taking. I'd rather distance myself from that selfishness."[108] Sarah K., on the other hand, does not think about her American identity as much. She has internalized it enough that "I don't say 'American' because I think people already know that." When asked about how she feels about "Americanness," Sarah reported taking pride in her American identity because "I have the freedom to believe and do what I want as a female, I think that is amazing because I know there are a lot of other countries where they [females] don't have credit like we do."[109] She continued, "Being born here and having all those opportunities at my fingertips, that is very fortunate."[110]

Sarah, although she confidently describes herself as "Persian and Mexican," is not overly concerned with the terminology she uses, unlike MarMar T. She stated she identifies as "Persian" because that is how her father always identified himself. For Sarah K. and Arezu K., "the use of the term [Persian] is more for convenience and hybridity,"

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[106] Farbod H., Oral History Interview.
[107] Farbod H., Oral History Interview.
[108] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.
[109] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.
[110] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.

as Neda Maghboulegh wrote.[111] MarMar, deeply conscious of her Iranian identity, is very careful about the terminology she uses in identification, as she lives near Los Angeles and the Westwood area that has been aptly nicknamed "Tehrangeles" in reference to its large proportion of Iranians citizens. When asked how she identifies, MarMar said, "'Iranian,' because I don't believe in saying 'Persian,' because 'Persian' makes me think of the whole 'Westwood stigma' – girls that use their culture to get guys."[112]

Big city second-generation interviewees, then, vary in how conflicted they feel about their identity. Nonetheless, they are still arguably less conflicted than the medium city second-generation Iranians. Sarah K., for example, has always maintained cultural celebrations, but other than that, she was not raised speaking the language nor did she have too many other Iranian influences in her life. For Sarah, it was always hard growing up and not being able to speak to her Iranian family members. Even to this day when she comes across other Iranians, she wishes she could speak to them. Because she could not communicate with her Iranian-speaking family and because she wishes she knew more about the culture, Sarah has developed a sense of not belonging, of not fitting in. She sees her friends who are fluent in Persian and says, "I wish I could have that too."[113] Nonetheless, despite these feelings, Sarah has not attempted to learn the language or study the culture in depth as much as the medium city second-generation Iranians have.

MarMar T.'s personal identity falls on the other end of the spectrum from Sarah K. She denies feeling any identity conflict, and as noted above would rather be fully identified as an Iranian. But what turns out to be a substantial identity conflict and lack of

[111] Maghbouleh, "'Inherited Nostalgia' Among Second-Generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at Southern California University," 207.
[112] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.
[113] Sarah K., Oral History Interview.

sense of belonging has largely to do with American politics and her father's emphasis on total Americanization. Her Iranian father does not support her learning about the culture and educating herself in the history and language. He has even gone so far as to discourage her from speaking Persian with him and the rest of her family, creating a sense of not belonging within her own family. She even stated that her father wants her to be "totally American" because of the mixed feelings he harbors for Iran, so much that to this day, he barely mentions his native land.[114] So while Sarah K. feels insufficiently Iranian among her family, MarMar feels active family pressure to reject her "Iranianness." MarMar has had to practically create her Iranian identity by herself. She even mentioned that she often feels insufficiently Iranian when people talk about aspects of the Iranian culture with which she is not familiar. Even after all of that, she mentioned no conflict between her identities, though. MarMar's strong sense of alienation and her attempts to create herself as completely Iranian seem to have more to do with medium city interviewees' efforts to compensate for growing up without a substantial Iranian community than they do with other big city interviewees' senses of themselves. While the big city second-generation Iranians range in how conflicted they feel about their identities, both MarMar T. and Sarah K. are unlike the big city first-generation Iranians in that they do not seek a "middle ground" of identification. Farbod H. is an outlier because, as previously mentioned, he is a Baha'i and does seek a "middle ground" of identification as a result of his faith. Sarah K. feels conflict in her identity in that her Iranianness is not substantial enough, especially compared to that of her friends. MarMar is immensely concerned about her identity, so much that she has had to create it and establish herself as such in hopes of fitting in more with her family and community. For Sarah and MarMar,

[114] MarMar T., Oral History Interview.

they do not feel a sense of homelessness, as do the first-generation Iranians. Instead, they feel different levels of non-belonging that result in how strongly they try to establish their identities as Iranian through means of cultural retention or in MarMar's case, cultural acquisition, and feelings toward their American identities.

Ultimately, both the medium and big city second-generation Iranians lack a concrete national identity, just as the first-generation Iranians do. Pride in culture among first-generation Iranians has often gotten in the way of accepting many of these second-generation Iranians as "fully Iranian." Thus, this attitude has contributed to an identity crisis among them. Many feel that because they were not born or raised in Iran, then many of their Iranian family and community members do not see them as "fully Iranian." Altogether, both medium and big city second-generation Iranians are not fully conscious of identification and the terminology they use, unlike the first-generation Iranian immigrants. Instead, the majority of these medium and big city second-generation Iranians place more importance on cultural retention than they do on identification, as a means of answering the question "What are we?" instead of "Who are we?" Most are simply not very conscious of the ways and means by which they identify, which is in direct contrast to how aware most of them are of their cultural retention or lack thereof. Although they may not be conscious of it, the ways in which they interact with their cultural retention is largely the means by which they facilitate their identities. The more involved they are with modes of cultural retention, and the more encouragement and influence they receive from their families to do so, "the more likely they are to identify themselves as either 'Iranian' or 'Iranian-American.'"[115]

[115] Mahdi, "Ethnic Identity Among Second-Generation Iranians in the United States," 85.

There is no denying that all the medium city second-generation interviewees maintain culture, that they are culturally "Iranian." The degree of their identification does vary slightly based on whether they have more interaction with and support from their Iranian families and communities, but it is not completely reliant on it. They can educate themselves and define themselves culturally in their medium city, nonetheless, and overcome their identity crises. While the big city second-generation Iranians do not feel the need to identify as strongly as the medium city second-generations do, they still maintain a sense of Iranian identity and are still conflicted about it. They feel proud of their cultures and families, they feel the need to maintain familial ties by continuing cultural practices, but all in all, the need to identify themselves is simply not as strong among all of them. How all of these second-generation Iranians, big or medium city, identify is inextricably tied to their position culturally: how much communalism, family ties, and pride in culture and language play a role in their lives. Regardless of whether these second-generation Iranians definitively identify as an "Iranian" or "Persian," they still manage cultural retention and work to pass culture on to their children, spouses, and partners. The national pride the Shahs worked so hard to instill persists decades later, but is not the only motivator of Iranian identity. Nilou Mostofi put it best, "Along with shared traditions, other characteristics such as language, history, the role of the family, status, occupation, and interpretation of the American culture contribute to the formation of the Iranian diasporic identity."[116] Moving forward, what is needed for the future generations is for cultural retention to continue and less exclusivity from the first-generation Iranians to occur and less opportunities for identity crises to slip in. If Iranians in the United States want to continue the pride in culture that we have seen thus far, then

[116] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 687.

the first step is to encourage "the second-generation to develop an Iranian identity"[117] in order to resolve the crises they feel.

[117] Mahdi, "Ethnic Identity Among Second-Generation Iranians in the United States," 94.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

For both medium and big city first- and second-generation Iranians, culture and identity are inextricably woven into an underlying narrative of pride established by the Reza Shah and the Shah's Iranian nationalism. How adaptation in every day matters, cultural retention, and identity actually take shape depends on where these Iranians reside. As we have seen, the medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants are able to simultaneously adapt to every-day matters of life and yet maintain retention of Iranian culture. This allows them define their place in a city where a large Iranian population is lacking, as opposed to in a city like Los Angeles, where it is not. The big city first-generation Iranians are more concerned with Persian language preservation as a means of cultural retention, which allows them to maintain familial and friendship connections: modes of communalism. As more social diversity and a larger Iranian population surround them, they are less concerned with cultural practices. Cultural retention, or acquisition, among second-generation Iranians is distinctly different than the cultural retention of the first-generation Iranians. Instead, the second-generation Iranians are stuck "in limbo" due to their English monolingualism, lack of cultural knowledge, and in-born Iranian experiences, not knowing where they belong among their Iranian families and communities. At the same time, their names and physical appearances often exclude them from American society. Again, the way they deal with their cultural "in-betweenness"

depends on the city where they reside. The medium city second-generation Iranians were concerned with establishing their "Iranianness" by means of educating themselves in the language, history, and cultural practices. They are also advocates on behalf of the culture: they educate those around them to defy the naivety created by the media. The big city second-generation Iranians, on the other hand, are unique and not as fluid in their cultural retention as the medium city second-generation Iranians are. Some of them are less concerned with the establishment of their cultural "Iranianness," while one very much so is. Another is Baha'i and appreciates a middle ground in his Iranianness and his Baha'i faith, instead of gravitating to just one or the other. Nonetheless, despite their wavering degrees of cultural retention, they do continue aspects of cultural retention in order to strengthen and maintain familial ties and they all agree on the importance of passing some of Iranian culture onto their children and spouses, which was stressed as the single most important quality in the continuation of cultural retention due to their pride in culture. However, cultural retention brings with it another factor addressed in Chapter 3, which is identity crises and the lack of a national identity between both first- and second-generation Iranians.

The medium city first-generation Iranian immigrants expressed far more conflict about their identities than the big city first-generation Iranian immigrants. The lack of conflict that the big city Iranian immigrants feel is in relation to the fact that three out of four of the big city first-generation Iranian immigrants are Baha'i, and due to the indifference that Baha'i's have on identification and nationality in general, identification and the terminology thereof is not as big of a concern to them. Additionally, due to the diversity that surrounds them, all four big city Iranians do not feel the need to defiantly

outline and identify themselves as Iranian. However, for those who do choose to identify as "Persian" rather than "Iranian," this terminology may be a by-product of the Shahs' Iranian nationalism where pride in true Iranian culture and identity was deemed as important. This "distinction and its effect on collective Iranian identity highlights the level of influence that the Pahlavi regime's modernization campaign still has on Iranian immigrants."[1] That program and the importance of pride in Iranian culture are the driving forces for why many Iranians who are abroad choose to associate as "Persian." As mentioned by Mobasher:

> The adoption of Persian as an ethnic identity choice, the glorification of pre-Islamic cultural celebrations, the creation of new cultural forms, the revitalization of Persian history, and the dissociation from Islamic identity among many Iranian immigrants in exile.[2]

For those who do identify as "American," they do so because it is their civic identity, whereas their "Iranian," or "Persian," identity is their cultural and born-into identity. Nonetheless, regardless of if they are a medium or big city first-generation Iranian immigrant, one thing they do have in common is the fact that they all feel a sense of homelessness, or lack of belonging or "fitting in." They do not feel like they fit in anywhere. Their lack of belonging leads them to maintain strong cultural ties so as not to forget their true identity and the motherland. The different ways in which they retain culture helps them bridge the gap between culture and national identity. Even if they do not plan to return to their homeland, they continue to relate to it "in one way or another."[3]

In contrast, the second-generation Iranians do not feel a sense of homelessness. Instead, many feel a lack of belonging among their Iranian families and communities.

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[1] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 688.
[2] Mobasher, "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States," 114.
[3] Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity," 365.

This is because most only speak English and lacking extensive knowledge of Iranian culture, traditions, and history, they feel a sense of identity conflict. The medium city second-generation Iranians persistently identify themselves as Iranians to establish their place in a society often lacking in diversity. In order to earn their Iranian identity, they take education into their own hands by learning Persian and more about Iranian culture and traditions so as to participate more in Iranian circles and gain acceptance. They are less concerned about the terminology they identify with, but are more concerned with their cultural practices as this is what will earn them acceptance as an Iranian. The big city second-generation Iranians do not need to defiantly establish their identity, as their surroundings are much more diverse. As wavering as their identification is, we see one that does care, mildly, about her identification, one that does not as much, as he is a Baha'i. However, we see one major outlier who has created her Iranian identity and feels so strongly about establishing it that she often denies her American identity. As both the medium and big city second-generation Iranians are born and raised American citizens, they feel the need to earn their Iranian identity through cultural retention in order to strengthen ties and family bonds. While my research into second-generation Iranian identity is not a definitive look, it is apparent that this creation of identity and a lack of unified identity among them exist quite emphatically. There is room, and quite frankly a need, for deeper and more expansive research into this topic, as these crises are an apparent ordeal for second-generation Iranians in both medium and big cities.

Due to the distinct cultural qualities these first- and second-generation Iranians maintain, they have been able to contribute more fully to a diverse American culture. We must not forget the cultural contributions this immigrant and second-generation group makes to

our society and allow it to engender a broader mindset just as these Iranians seek to do not only for themselves, but for their future generations as well.

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